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French Section

THE TWELVE BEST SHORT STORIES IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

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THE TWELVE BEST SHORT STORIES IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

SELECTED BY
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PREFACE

FRENCH literature is perhaps more abundant than any other in those short works of imagination that are called in France *contes* or *nouvelles*, in order to contrast them with those extended narratives for which the name of *romans* is reserved. As far back as the Middle Ages, during the period of the interminable *chansons de geste*, then of the romances of chivalry, not less diffuse, which succeeded them, the French took pleasure in telling short stories, of which some, such as *Aucassin and Nicolette*, still retain, for those whom their antiquated language does not repel, much interest and charm. In like manner, when the Renaissance ends, in the period of the ample burlesque epic of Rabelais, the Queen of Navarre, in the tales of her *Heptameron*, vies with the *novellieri* of Italy. In the following century, during which Spanish influence prevailed, we hardly find any more short stories appearing in separate form, but novelists, in the manner of Cervantes in his *Don Quixote*, interpolate some here and there in the plot of their main works of fiction, as halts and resting-places for the mind of the reader: like D'Urfé in his *Astrea*, or Madame De La Fayette in *Zaïde*; like, again, Le Sage in his *Gil Blas* at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Later on, the eighteenth century will come to restore the *genre* to its sway, and Voltaire will be a master in it; nevertheless he will hardly cultivate it without making it serve philosophical purposes. Along with him, more than one minor story-teller of merit, such as the Chevalier De Boufflers, could be named, but

not without regret that their wit and elegance should be employed in the service of a somewhat libertine morality.

From the rapid sketch which precedes, the reasons, whether of substance or of form, which prevent us from including in our selection any of the short stories which were written before the nineteenth century, will easily be deduced. Besides, it is only then that the *genre* flourishes in all directions, and that the writers who cultivate it produce the most numerous, finished and varied *nouvelles* and *contes*. The names of the twelve authors selected were obviously all imposed upon us; but our embarrassment commenced when it was necessary to choose one single tale from their works. It is certain, for instance, that we might have preferred, in the case of Alphonse Daudet, a page in which his trembling sensibility was expressed, and not one of those into which he has rather put his witty Provençal gaiety; and some people may regret that Guy de Maupassant is represented here by a sentimental tale rather than one of those stories into which he has poured his bitter realism and his black pessimism. To those who might be inclined to reproach us, we would answer that we have been guided, not only by the wish to present always the most characteristic work of each author, but by that of giving to our selection the greatest variety of tone among the narratives thus placed in juxtaposition, and also by the desire never to lose sight of any moral proprieties. We have only imposed upon ourselves one absolute rule: only to offer here perfect, indisputable masterpieces. We hope that no one will question our success in this.

A. D.

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* Published posthumously. "Stendhal" died in 1842.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The third, fifth to seventh, and ninth to twelfth inclusive, of these stories have been translated by Mr. William Metcalfe; the second and fourth by Miss Measham; the eighth by Miss Lyons; while for the first an anonymous translation has been used, which was originally published in 1826, but has been considerably revised for this volume by Mr. Adam L. Gowans.

It should be remembered that M. Dorchain's selection was restricted by the plan of the series to the works of authors no longer living and to stories not exceeding 15,000 words in length. It should also be borne in mind that the notes in the present volume are, without exception, those of the original authors, the translators having done nothing more than translate carefully without omission or addition.

THE TWELVE BEST SHORT STORIES IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

THE ADVENTURES OF THE LAST OF THE ABENCERRAGES

VISCOUNT CHATEAUBRIAND

ADVERTISEMENT

THE *Adventures of the last of the Abencerrages* were written nearly twenty years ago; the portrait which I have sketched of the Spaniards explains sufficiently why this story could not be printed under the Imperial government. The resistance of the Spaniards to Buonaparte, of a defenceless nation to the conqueror, who had vanquished the best soldiers of Europe, excited at that time the enthusiasm of every heart susceptible of being affected by great devotedness and noble sacrifices. The ruins of Saragossa were still smoking, and the censorship would not have suffered the publication of eulogiums, in which it would have discovered, rightly enough, a concealed interest for the victims. Pictures of the ancient manners of Europe, recollections of the glory of former times, and those of the court of one of our most distinguished monarchs, would not have been more agreeable to the censorship, which besides began to repent having so often allowed me to speak of the ancient monarchy, and of the religion of our fathers: these departed subjects, which I was incessantly recalling, excited too powerfully the thoughts of the living.

It is a frequent practice, in pictures, to place some unseemly personage for the purpose of bringing out more the beauty of others: in this story, my idea has been to paint three men of equally elevated character, but not out of the usual course of nature, and retaining, along with the passions, the manners and even the prejudices of their country. The character of the female is also drawn in the same proportions. The world of

imagination, when we transport ourselves thither, should at least make us amends for the world of reality.

It will readily be seen that this story is the composition of a man who has felt the pangs of exile, and whose heart is entirely wrapt up in his country.

The views, so to speak, which I have given of Granada, of the Alhambra, and of the ruined mosque transformed into a church, were taken upon the spot. The latter is nothing else than the cathedral of Cordova. These descriptions are therefore a kind of addition to the following passage of the *Itinerary*. "From Cadiz, I repaired to Cordova; I admired the mosque which is now the cathedral of that city. I traversed the ancient Betica, described by the poets as the abode of happiness. I ascended as far as Andujar, and retraced my steps in order to see Granada. The Alhambra appeared to me well worthy of being looked at, even after the temples of Greece. The valley of Granada is delightful, and reminds one very much of that of Sparta; that the Moors should have regretted such a country may be easily conceived."—(*Itinerary*, part VII. and last).

There are frequent allusions in this story to the history of the Zegris and the Abencerrages; this history is so well known, that I have thought it superfluous to give any sketch of it in this advertisement. Besides, the story itself contains sufficient details to make the text easily understood.

WHEN Boabdil, the last king of Granada, was compelled to abandon the kingdom of his forefathers, he halted on the top of Mount Padul. That elevated spot commanded a view of the sea, on which the unfortunate monarch was about to embark for Africa; from it also could be discovered Granada, the Vega, and the Xenil, on the banks of which were erected the tents of Ferdinand and Isabella. At the sight of this beautiful country, and of the cypresses which still marked here and there the tombs of the Mussulmans, Boabdil began to shed tears. The sultana Ayxa, his mother, who accompanied him in his exile, along with the grandees who formerly composed his court, said to him: "Weep now like a woman, for the loss of a kingdom, which thou hast been unable to defend like a man." They descended from the mountain, and Granada disappeared from their eyes for ever.

The Moors of Spain, who shared the fate of their

sovereign, dispersed themselves throughout Africa; the tribes of the Zegris and the Gomeres settled in the kingdom of Fez, which was their aboriginal country; the Vanegas and the Alabeses took up their abode upon the coast, from Oran to Algiers; finally the Abencerrages established themselves in the environs of Tunis; they formed, within sight of the ruins of Carthage, a colony, which, even in our own times, is distinguished from the Moors of Africa, by its elegant manners, and the mildness of its laws.

These families carried into their new country the remembrance of their old one. The *Paradise of Granada* lived constantly in their memory, the mothers repeated its name to their children at the breast. They lulled them to sleep with the romances of the Zegris and the Abencerrages. Prayers were repeated in the mosque every five days, with the face turned towards Granada; and Allah was implored to restore to his chosen people that land of delights. In vain did the country of the Lotos-eaters present to the exiles its fruits, its waters, its verdure, and its glorious sun; far from the *Vermilion Towers*,[1] there were neither pleasant fruits, limpid springs, fresh verdure, nor sun worthy to be looked at. If any one shewed the plains of Bagrada to an exile, the latter only shook his head, and exclaimed with a sigh: "Granada!"

The Abencerrages, particularly, preserved the most tender and faithful remembrance of their country. They had quitted, with the most poignant anguish, the theatre of their glory, and the banks which they had made so often ring with the war-cry of "Honour and love." Being no longer able to lift the lance in the deserts, or to wear the helmet in a colony of farmers, they had devoted themselves to the study of simples, a profession in equal estimation among the Arabs with that of arms. Thus did that race of warriors, which formerly inflicted wounds, now make its occupation that of healing them. In this

[1] The towers of a palace at Granada.

particular, it retained something of its original genius, for the knights themselves frequently dressed the wounds of the enemies they had overthrown.

The cottage of that family, which formerly possessed palaces, was not placed in the hamlet of the other exiles, at the foot of Mount Mamelife; it was built amidst the very ruins of Carthage, on the sea-shore, in the place where St. Louis expired on the ashes, and where a Mahometan hermitage is now to be seen. Along the walls of the cottage were hung bucklers made of lions' skins, bearing, impressed upon a field of azure, two figures of savages breaking down a town with a club; round the device was this motto: "It is but little!" the coat of arms and device of the Abencerrages. Lances adorned with white and blue pennons, burnouses, and cassocks of slashed satin, were ranged by the side of the bucklers, and figured in the midst of scimitars and poniards. Here and there also were suspended gauntlets, bits ornamented with precious stones, large silver stirrups, long swords, whose sheaths had been embroidered by the hands of princesses, and golden spurs, with which the Iseults, the Guineveres and Orianas were wont of old to invest gallant knights.

Beneath these trophies of glory, were placed upon tables the trophies of a life of peace. These were plants culled on the summits of Mount Atlas, and in the desert of Sahara; many of them had even been brought from the plain of Granada. Some were intended to relieve the ailments of the body; others were supposed to mitigate the severity of mental suffering. The Abencerrages regarded as most valuable those which were useful in calming vain regrets, in dissipating foolish illusions, and the ever-reviving, ever-deceived, hopes of happiness. Unfortunately these simples possessed qualities of an opposite nature, and the sweet odour of a flower of their own country frequently acted as a sort of poison to the illustrious exiles.

Twenty-four years had passed away since the taking of Granada. In that short space of time, fourteen Abencerrages had perished, by the effects of a new climate, the accidents of a wandering life, and principally through grief, which imperceptibly undermines the strength of man. One single descendant was the sole hope of that illustrious family. Aben-Hamet bore the name of that Abencerrage, who was accused by the Zegris of having seduced the sultana Alfayma. In him were united the beauty, the valour, the courtesy and the generosity of his ancestors, with that mild lustre and slight tinge of melancholy which adversity, nobly supported, inspires. He was only twenty-two years of age when he lost his father; he then determined to make a pilgrimage to the land of his ancestors, in order to gratify the secret longing of his heart, and to execute a plan which he carefully concealed from his mother.

He embarked at the port of Tunis; a favourable wind carried him to Carthagena, where he landed, and immediately proceeded on the road to Granada. He gave himself out for an Arabian physician, who had come to collect plants amid the rocks of the Sierra Nevada. A quiet mule bore him slowly along in the country where formerly the Abencerrages were carried with the swiftness of the wind on warlike coursers; a guide walked before, leading two other mules ornamented with bells and parti-coloured woollen tufts. Aben-Hamet crossed the large heaths and woods of palm-trees of the kingdom of Murcia; from the great age of these trees, he conjectured that they must have been planted by his ancestors, and his heart was pierced by regret. There rose a tower in which the sentinel, in former times, kept watch, during the wars of the Moors and Christians; here appeared a ruined building whose architecture proved its Moorish origin; a fresh subject of grief to Aben-Hamet! He dismounted from his mule, and, on pretence of seeking for plants, hid himself for a few moments, in

the ruins, in order to give free vent to his tears. He then proceeded on his road, in a state of reverie, which was encouraged by the noise of the mule-bells, and the monotonous song of his guide. The latter only interrupted his long-winded ditty, in order to quicken the pace of his mules by giving them the names of *beautiful* and *brave*, or to scold them by the epithets of *lazy* and *obstinate*.

Flocks of sheep, directed by a shepherd like an army, in sere and barren plains, and occasionally a solitary traveller, far from diffusing an appearance of life upon the road, only served, in a manner, to make it more gloomy and desert. These travellers all wore a sword attached to the waist; they were wrapped up in a mantle, and a large slouched hat half covered their faces. As they passed, they saluted Aben-Hamet, who could only make out, in their noble salutation, the names of God, of Señor and of Knight. At the close of day, the Abencerrage took his place in the midst of strangers at the inn, without being troubled by their indiscreet curiosity. No one spoke to him, no one questioned him; his turban, his robe, and his arms, excited no surprise. As it had been the will of Allah, that the Moors of Spain should lose their beautiful country, Aben-Hamet could not help entertaining a feeling of esteem for its grave conquerors.

Emotions still more vivid awaited the Abencerrage at the end of his journey. Granada is built at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, on two high hills, separated by a deep valley. The houses, built on the declivities in the hollow of the valley, give this city the shape and appearance of a grenado half open, from which resemblance it derives its name. Two rivers, the Xenil and the Darro, the sands of the first of which contain gold, and the other silver, wash the feet of the hills, form a junction, and afterwards take a serpentine course in the midst of a charming valley, called the Vega. This plain, which

is overlooked by Granada, is covered with vines, with pomegranate, fig, mulberry and orange-trees; it is surrounded by mountains of singularly beautiful form and colour. An enchanting sky, a pure and delicious air, affect the soul with a secret languor, from which even the passing traveller finds it difficult to preserve himself. Every one feels that, in this country, the tender passions would have very soon stifled the heroic ones, if true love did not always feel the wish to have glory as its companion.

As soon as Aben-Hamet discovered the tops of the first buildings of Granada, his heart beat so violently, that he was obliged to stop his mule. Crossing his arms over his breast, and fixing his eyes on the holy city, he remained speechless and immovable. . The guide halted in his turn; and, as elevated sentiments are easily understood by a Spaniard, he appeared affected, and conjectured that the Moor's feelings were excited by the sight of his former country. The Abencerrage at last broke silence.

"Guide!" said he, "be happy! hide not the truth from me, for the waves were calm, and the moon entered into her crescent, on the day of thy nativity. What are these towers which shine like stars over a green forest?"

"That is the Alhambra," answered the guide.

"And the other castle upon the opposite hill?" said Aben-Hamet.

"It is the Generalife," replied the Spaniard. "In that castle there is a garden planted with myrtles, where it is said the Abencerrage was surprised with the sultana Alfayma; farther off, you see the Albaycin, and nearer to us the Vermilion Towers."

Every word which the guide uttered pierced the heart of Aben-Hamet. How cruel it is to be obliged to have recourse to strangers for information respecting the monuments of our ancestors, and to have the history of our family and friends related to us by indifferent persons! The guide, putting an end to the reflections of

Aben-Hamet, exclaimed: "Let us proceed, Sir Moor; it is the will of God! Do not be downcast. Is not Francis I., even now, a prisoner in our Madrid? It is the will of God!" He took off his hat, crossed himself with great fervour, and drove on his mules. The Abencerrage, spurring on his, exclaimed in his turn: "It was thus written;"[1] and they descended towards Granada.

They passed close to the great ash-tree, memorable as the scene of the battle between Musa and the grand-master of Calatrava, in the time of the last king of Granada. They made the circuit of the Alameda walk, and entered the city by the gate of Elvira. They reascended the Rambla, and arrived shortly after at a square, surrounded on all sides by buildings of Moorish architecture. A khan was opened in this square for the Moors of Africa, whom the trade in silks of the Vega attracted in crowds to Granada. Thither the guide conducted Aben-Hamet.

The Abencerrage was too agitated to enjoy much rest in his new habitation; the idea of his country tormented him. Unable any longer to master the feelings which preyed upon his heart, he stole out, in the middle of the night, to wander about the streets of Granada. He attempted to recognize, with his eyes or with his hands, some of the monuments which the elders of his tribe had so frequently described to him. Perhaps the lofty edifice, whose walls he could only half distinguish through the darkness, was formerly the residence of the Abencerrages; perhaps it was in this solitary square that those splendid carousals were given, which raised the glory of Granada to the skies. There it was that the troops of horsemen, superbly dressed in brocade, marched in procession; there advanced the galleys loaded with arms and with flowers, the dragons darting out fire, and carry-

[1] An expression which the Mussulmans have constantly in their mouths, and apply to almost every event in their lives.

ing illustrious warriors concealed in their sides; ingenious inventions of pleasure and gallantry.

But alas! in place of the sound of *anafins*, of the noise of trumpets, and of songs of love, the deepest silence reigned around Aben-Hamet. This mute city had changed its inhabitants, and the victors reposed on the couches of the vanquished. "They sleep then, these proud Spaniards," exclaimed the young Moor with indignation, "under the roofs from which they have banished my ancestors! And I, an Abencerrage, I wake, unknown, solitary and forsaken, at the gate of my fathers' palace."

Aben-Hamet then reflected upon the destinies of man, on the vicissitudes of fortune, on the fall of empires, lastly on Granada itself surprised by its enemies in the midst of pleasures, and exchanging all at once its garlands of flowers for chains; he pictured to himself its citizens forsaking their homes in gala dresses, like guests, who, in the disorder of their attire, are suddenly driven from the chambers of festivity by a conflagration.

All these images, all these ideas, crowded on one another in the soul of Aben-Hamet; full of grief and anguish, his thoughts were principally turned to the execution of the project which had brought him to Granada. Day surprised him in his reverie; the Abencerrage had lost his way: he found himself far from the khan, in a remote suburb of the city. All was yet asleep: no noise disturbed the silence of the streets; the doors and windows of the houses were still shut; the clarion of the cock alone proclaimed, in the habitation of the poor, the return of labour and of hardship.

After wandering about for a long time, without being able to find his way, Aben-Hamet heard a door open. He saw a young female come out, dressed nearly like the Gothic queens which we see sculptured on the monuments of our ancient abbeys; her black corset trimmed with jet tightened her elegant waist. Her short petticoat, narrow and without folds, discovered a beautiful

leg and charming foot; a mantilla, also black, was thrown over her head; with her left hand she held this mantilla crossed and drawn up close like a stomacher under her chin, in such a manner that nothing was seen of her face but her large eyes and rosy mouth. A duenna walked by her side; a page preceded her, carrying a prayer-book; two footmen in livery followed at some distance the beautiful unknown; she was repairing to morning prayers, which were announced by the ringing of a bell in a neighbouring monastery.

Aben-Hamet fancied he saw the angel Israfel, or the youngest of the houris. The Spanish maiden, not less surprised, looked at the Abencerrage, whose turban, robe and arms set off to still greater advantage his noble countenance. Recovering from her first astonishment, she beckoned to the stranger to approach, with the grace and freedom peculiar to the women of that country. "Sir Moor," said she to him, "you appear to have recently arrived at Granada; have you lost your way?"

"Sultana of flowers," replied Aben-Hamet, "delight of men's eyes, Christian slave more beautiful than the virgins of Georgia, thou hast rightly guessed! I am a stranger in this city: having lost myself amidst its palaces, I was unable to find my way back to the khan of the Moors. May Mahomet touch thy heart, and reward thee for thy hospitality!"

"The Moors are renowned for their gallantry," replied the lady with the sweetest smile; "but I am neither sultana of flowers, nor a slave, nor desirous of being recommended to Mahomet. Follow me, Sir knight, I will lead you back to the khan of the Moors."

She walked lightly before the Abencerrage, led him to the door of the khan, to which she pointed with her hand, then passed on to the back of a palace, and disappeared.

To what then is the repose of life attached? His country no longer occupies solely and exclusively the

mind of Aben-Hamet; Granada is no longer in his eyes deserted, forsaken, widowed and solitary; she is dearer than ever to his heart, but it is a new glamour which embellishes her ruins; with the recollection of his ancestors is now mingled another charm. Aben-Hamet has discovered the burial-place where the ashes of the Abencerrages repose; but while he prays, throws himself on the ground, and sheds a flood of filial tears, he fancies that the young Spanish maiden has sometimes passed over these tombs, and he no longer considers his ancestors as so unfortunate.

In vain does he wish to occupy himself with nothing but his pilgrimage to the land of his fathers; in vain does he scour the hills of the Darro and the Xenil to gather plants from them at the morning-dawn; the young Christian lady is the flower which he is now in search of. What fruitless efforts he has already made to discover the palace of his enchantress! How many times has he attempted to retrace the ground over which his divine guide conducted him! How many times has he fancied that he has recognized the same bell, and the same cock-crow, which he had heard near the house of the Spanish lady! Deceived by similar sounds, he runs immediately to the side from which they proceed; but the magic palace nowhere presents itself to his eyes! Frequently also the uniformity of the female dress at Granada gave him a moment of hope: at a distance every Christian female resembled the mistress of his heart; when close to him, not one possessed her beauty or her grace. Finally, Aben-Hamet had made the round of the churches, in order to discover the stranger; he had even penetrated to the tomb of Ferdinand and Isabella, but this was the greatest sacrifice which he had yet made to love.

One day he was herborizing in the valley of the Darro. The flowery declivity of the southern hill supported the walls of the Alhambra, and the gardens of the Generalife; the northern hill was adorned with the Albaycin, with

smiling orchards, and with grottoes, inhabited by a numerous population. At the western extremity of the valley, were descried the spires of Granada, which rose in groups from the midst of holm-oaks and cypresses. At the other extremity, towards the east, the eye rested upon points of rocks, convents and hermitages, some of the ruins of the ancient Illiberia, and in the distance the heights of the Sierra Nevada. The waters of the Darro rolled along in the middle of the vale, and presented on the margin of its course newly erected mills, noisy waterfalls, the broken arches of a Roman aqueduct, and the remains of a bridge of the time of the Moors.

Aben-Hamet was neither miserable enough, nor happy enough, to enjoy properly the charms of solitude; he roamed over these beautiful banks with absence and indifference. In the course of his random walk, he struck into an alley of trees which wound round the declivity of the hill of the Albaycin. A country-house, surrounded by a grove of orange-trees, soon presented itself to his view; as he approached the grove, he heard the sounds of a voice and a guitar. Between the voice, the features and looks of a woman there are relations which never deceive a man whom love possesses. "It is my houri!" said Aben-Hamet, and he listened with a beating heart; at the name of the Abencerrages several times repeated, his heart beat still quicker. The fair unknown was singing a Spanish romance retracing the history of the Abencerrages and the Zegris. Aben-Hamet was no longer able to resist his emotion; he darted through a hedge of myrtle, and found himself in the midst of a party of young ladies, who were alarmed at his appearance, and, with loud screams, fled in all directions. The Spanish lady who had been singing, and who still held the guitar, exclaimed: "It is the Moorish gentleman!" and called back her companions. "Favourite of the genii," said the Abencerrage, "I sought thee as an Arab searches for a spring at the heat of noon. I heard the sound of thy

guitar; thou wert singing the heroes of my country. I discovered thee by the beauty of thy accents, and I come to lay at thy feet the heart of Aben-Hamet."

"And it was with thoughts of you," replied Donna Blanca, "that I was repeating the romance of the Abencerrages: ever since I saw you, I have fancied that these Moorish knights resembled you."

The colour mounted slightly to Blanca's forehead as she pronounced these words. Aben-Hamet felt as if he could have thrown himself at the feet of the young Christian, and declared to her that he was himself the last Abencerrage; but a remnant of prudence restrained him: he was afraid lest his name, too celebrated at Granada, should give uneasiness to the governor. The war with the Moriscoes was scarcely terminated, and the presence of an Abencerrage at that moment might give the Spaniards just cause of apprehension. It was not that Aben-Hamet was alarmed at the prospect of danger; but he trembled at the idea of being obliged to remove himself for ever from the daughter of Don Rodrigo.

Donna Blanca was descended from a family which derived its origin from the Cid de Bivar, and from Ximena, the daughter of Count Gormez de Gormas. The posterity of the conqueror of Valencia the Beautiful, owing to the ingratitude of the court of Castille, was reduced to a state of extreme poverty; it was even believed, for several centuries, to be extinct, such was the obscurity into which it had fallen. But, about the time of the conquest of Granada, a last descendant of the race of the Bivars, the grandfather of Blanca, made himself distinguished, less by his pedigree than by his signal valour. After the expulsion of the infidels, Ferdinand rewarded this descendant of the Cid with the estates of several Moorish families, and created him Duke of Santa Fé. The newly created Duke fixed his residence at Granada, and died while still young, leaving an only son already married, Don Rodrigo, father of Blanca.

Donna Teresa de Xeres, the wife of Don Rodrigo, gave birth to a son, who received, at his birth, the name of Rodrigo, like all his ancestors, but was called Don Carlos, to distinguish him from his father. The great events of which Don Carlos was a witness from his earliest years, the dangers to which he was exposed while yet in his nonage, contributed to render still more grave and severe a character naturally disposed to austerity. Don Carlos was scarcely fourteen years of age, when he followed Cortez to Mexico: he supported all the dangers, and was a witness of all the horrors, of that astonishing adventure; and he was present at the overthrow of the last king of a world until then unknown. Three years after that catastrophe, Don Carlos had returned to Europe, and was present at the battle of Pavia, as if he had come to witness kingly honour and valour sinking under the strokes of fortune. The aspect of a new world, long voyages on seas which had never before been navigated, and the spectacle of the revolutions and vicissitudes of fate, had made a deep impression on the religious and melancholy imagination of Don Carlos. He entered into the knightly order of Calatrava; and, renouncing marriage in spite of Don Rodrigo's prayers, destined his whole fortune to his sister.

Blanca de Bivar, the only sister of Don Carlos, and much younger than he, was the idol of her father. She had lost her mother, and had just entered into her eighteenth year, when Aben-Hamet made his appearance at Granada. Everything about this enchanting woman was fascination itself; her voice was ravishing and her dancing lighter than the zephyr. Sometimes she delighted in directing a chariot, like Armida; at other times she flew upon the back of the swiftest barb of Andalusia, like those charming fairies who appeared to Tristan and to Galaor in the forests. Athens would have taken her for Aspasia, and Paris for Diana of Poitiers, who was then beginning to shine at the court. But, with the

charms of a Frenchwoman, she had all the passions of a Spaniard, and her natural coquetry in no degree diminished the fixity, the constancy, the strength and elevation of the feelings of her heart.

At the noise of the screams, which the young ladies sent forth, when Aben-Hamet rushed into the midst of the grove, Don Rodrigo came running up. "My father," said Blanca, "this is the Moorish gentleman of whom I spoke to you. He heard me singing, and recognized me; he entered the garden to thank me for having put him in his right road."

The Duke of Santa Fé received the Abencerrage with the grave and yet unaffected politeness of the Spaniards. One remarks in this nation none of those servile airs, none of those circumlocutory phrases, which reveal the abjectness of ideas, and the degradation of the soul. The language of the first nobleman and of the peasant is the same, the salutation the same, the compliments, habits and customs are the same. In proportion as the confidence and generosity of this people to strangers is unbounded, in the same proportion is its vengeance terrible when betrayed. Of heroic courage, of patience inexhaustible, incapable of yielding to bad fortune, it must either vanquish or be crushed. It has little of what is called wit, but exalted passions are with it a substitute for that light which is derived from the refinement and abundance of ideas. A Spaniard, who passes the day without speaking, who has seen nothing, and cares not for seeing anything, who has read nothing, studied nothing, compared nothing, will yet discover, in the greatness of his resolutions, the necessary resources at the moment of adversity.

It was Don Rodrigo's birthday, and Blanca was giving her father a *tertulia*, or little entertainment, in this delightful solitude. The Duke invited Aben-Hamet to seat himself amidst the young ladies, who were amused at the turban and robe of the stranger. Some velvet

cushions were brought, and Aben-Hamet reclined himself on these cushions in the Moorish fashion. He was questioned respecting his country, and his adventures; he replied to these enquiries with spirit and vivacity. He spoke the purest Castilian; one could have taken him for a Spaniard, if he had not almost constantly said *thou* instead of *you*. This word had something so sweet about it in his mouth, that Blanca could not help feeling a secret annoyance when he addressed it to one of her companions.

A numerous retinue of servants appeared, and were the bearers of chocolate, of fruit cakes, and little sweet cakes from Malaga, white as snow, porous and light as sponges. After the *refresco*, Blanca was entreated to execute one of those national dances, in which she excelled the most accomplished Gitanas. She was obliged to accede to the wishes of her friends. Aben-Hamet was silent, but his supplicating looks spoke as eloquently as his mouth would have done. Blanca chose a *zambra*, an expressive dance which the Spaniards have borrowed from the Moors.

One of the young ladies began to play upon the guitar the air of this foreign dance. The daughter of Don Rodrigo took off her veil, and fastened a pair of ebony castanets round her white hands. Her black hair falls in ringlets on her alabaster neck; her mouth and her eyes smile in concert; her colour is animated by the action of her heart. All at once she makes the noisy ebony re-echo, beats time three times, commences the song of the *zambra*, and, mingling her voice with the sounds of the guitar, darts off like lightning.

What variety in her steps! What elegance in her attitudes! Now she raises her arms with vivacity, then she lets them fall with languor. Sometimes she springs forward as if intoxicated with pleasure, and then retires as if overwhelmed with sorrow. She turns her head, seems to call to her some invisible person, modestly holds

out her rosy cheek to receive the kiss of a newly married husband, flies back ashamed, returns delighted and consoled, marches with a noble and almost warlike step, afterwards skims afresh the verdant mead. The harmony between her dancing, her singing, and the music of the guitar was perfect. The voice of Blanca, slightly husky, had that species of accent which stirs the passions to the very bottom of the soul. The Spanish music, composed of sighs, of lively movements, of melancholy repetitions, of airs suddenly stopped, presents a singular mixture of gaiety and melancholy. This music and this dancing settled the destiny of the last Abencerrage irrecoverably; they would have been sufficient to trouble a heart less susceptible than his.

In the evening they returned to Granada by the valley of the Darro. Don Rodrigo was so delighted with the noble and polished manners of Aben-Hamet, that he would not let him depart without receiving his promise to come frequently and amuse Blanca with the wonderful stories of the East. The Moor, at the height of his wishes, accepted the invitation of the Duke of Santa Fé; and, beginning with the following day, he was regular in his visits to the palace where she breathed whom he loved more than the light of day.

Blanca found her heart very soon engaged in a deep passion, from the very impossibility she had fancied that ever she should feel that passion. That any one should love an infidel, a Moor, an unknown stranger, appeared to her so extraordinary, that she took no precaution against the malady which began to insinuate itself into her veins. But no sooner did she become sensible of its inroads, than she accepted this malady like a true Spaniard. The dangers and troubles, which she foresaw, neither made her draw back when on the brink of the precipice, nor deliberate long with her heart. She said to herself: "Let Aben-Hamet become a Christian, let him love me, and I will follow him to the extremity of the earth."

On his part, the Abencerrage also felt the full power of an irresistible passion: he no longer lived but for Blanca; he no longer occupied himself with the plans which had brought him to Granada. It was easy for him to obtain the information which he came expressly in pursuit of: but every other interest, except that of his love, had vanished from his eyes. He even dreaded the knowledge which might produce a change in his mode of existence. He asked for nothing; he wished not to know anything. He said to himself: "Let Blanca become a Mahometan, let her love me, and I will serve her to my last sigh."

Thus determined in their resolutions, Aben-Hamet and Blanca only waited for a favourable moment to discover their mutual sentiments to each other. It was then the best time of the year. "You have not yet seen the Alhambra," said the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé to the Abencerrage. "If I can guess, by some words which have dropped from you, your family is originally from Granada. You will perhaps be pleased to visit the palace of your ancient kings? I will myself, this evening, be your guide thither."

Aben-Hamet swore, by the prophet, that no excursion could ever be more agreeable to him.

When the hour appointed for this pilgrimage to the Alhambra arrived, the daughter of Don Rodrigo mounted a white hackney, accustomed to climb the rocks like a deer. Aben-Hamet accompanied the brilliant Spaniard on an Andalusian horse, equipped in the Turkish manner. In the rapid course of the young Moor, his purple robe swelled out behind him, his crooked sabre echoed on the elevated saddle, and the wind shook the plume with which his turban was surmounted. The common people, charmed by his graceful carriage, said as they saw him pass: "It is an infidel prince whom Donna Blanca is going to convert."

They first went up a long street which still bore the

name of an illustrious Moorish family. This street bordered on the exterior inclosure of the Alhambra. They then crossed a wood of young elm-trees, arrived at a fountain, and shortly found themselves in front of the interior inclosure of the palace of Boabdil. In a wall flanked with towers and surmounted by battlements, was a gate called the Gate of Judgement. They passed through this first gate, and proceeded along a narrow road which led them in a serpentine course between high walls and half-ruined hovels. This road brought them to the square of the Algibes, close to which Charles V. was then erecting a palace. From thence, turning northward, they halted in a deserted court, at the foot of an unornamented wall, out of repair from the effects of time. Aben-Hamet, springing lightly to the ground, presented his hand to Blanca, and assisted her in alighting from her mule. The servants knocked at a deserted door, the threshold of which was concealed by the grass; the door opened, and all at once disclosed to view the secret recesses of the Alhambra.

All the charms of, and regrets for, his country, mingled with the glamour of love, seized the heart of Aben-Hamet. Silent and immovable, his wondering looks dived into this habitation of the genii. He fancied himself transported to the entrance of one of those palaces the account of which one reads in the Arabian tales. Light galleries, canals of white marble bordered with lemon and orange-trees in full bloom, fountains, and solitary courts, presented themselves in all directions to the eyes of Aben-Hamet; and through the lengthened vaults of the porticoes he perceived other labyrinths and fresh enchantments. The azure of the most beautiful sky appeared between the columns, which supported a chain of Gothic arches. The walls were covered with arabesques, which seemed to the eye like imitations of those stuffs of the East, which, in the ennui of the harem, are embroidered by the caprice of a female slave. An

air of voluptuousness, of religion, and of war, seemed to breathe in this magic edifice; it was a species of lovers' cloister, a mysterious retreat, where the Moorish sovereigns tasted all the pleasures, and forgot all the duties of life.

After some minutes of surprise and silence, the two lovers entered into this residence of fallen greatness and past felicities. They first made the round of the hall of Mexuar, in the midst of the perfume of flowers and the freshness of waters. They then penetrated into the Court of Lions. The agitation of Aben-Hamet increased at every step. "Didst thou not fill my soul with delight," said he to Blanca, "with what pain should I find myself obliged to ask of thee, a Spaniard, the history of this palace! Ah! these places are made to serve as a retreat for happiness, and I!..."

Aben-Hamet perceived the name of Boabdil enchased in the mosaics: "O my king!" exclaimed he, "what is become of thee? where shall I find thee in thy deserted Alhambra?" And tears of fidelity, of loyalty, and of honour suffused the eyes of the young Moor. "Your old masters," said Blanca, "or rather the kings of your fathers, were ungrateful."—"What matter!" returned the Abencerrage, "they were unfortunate!"

As he pronounced these words, Blanca conducted him into an apartment which seemed to be the very sanctuary of the temple of love. The elegance of this asylum could not be surpassed; the entire ceiling, painted blue and gold, and composed of arabesques of filagree work, allowed the light to appear as if through a tissue of flowers. A fountain spouted in the midst of the building, the waters of which, falling again in a shower of dew, were received in an alabaster shell. "Aben-Hamet," said the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé, "look well at this fountain; it received the disfigured heads of the Abencerrages. You can still see, on the marble, the stain of the blood of the unhappy men who were

sacrificed to Boabdil's suspicions. It is thus that, in your country, men who seduce credulous women are treated."

Aben-Hamet had ceased to listen to Blanca; he had prostrated himself, and kissed respectfully the mark of the blood of his ancestors. Then rising he exclaimed: "O Blanca! I swear, by the blood of these knights, to love thee with the constancy, the fidelity and the ardour of an Abencerrage!"

"You love me then?" returned Blanca, clasping her beautiful hands, and raising her eyes to heaven; "but do you forget that you are an infidel, a Moor, an enemy, and that I am a Christian and a Spaniard?"

"O holy prophet!" said Aben-Hamet, "be thou witness of my oaths!..." Blanca interrupted him. "And what reliance think you can I place on the oaths of a persecutor of my God? Do you know whether I love you? Who has given you the assurance to use such language to me?"

Aben-Hamet in consternation replied: "True, lady, I am only thy slave; thou hast not chosen me to be thy knight."

"Moor," said Blanca, "lay artifice aside. Thou hast seen, by my looks, that I loved thee; my passion for thee exceeds all bounds: be a Christian, and nothing shall prevent me from being thine. But, if the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé venture to speak to thee thus frankly, thou mayest judge, from that very circumstance, that she will know how to conquer herself, and that no enemy of the Christians shall ever possess any claim on her."

Aben-Hamet, in a transport of passion, seized the hands of Blanca, and placed them first on his turban, and then on his heart: "Allah is powerful," he cried, "and Aben-Hamet is happy! O Mahomet, let this Christian acknowledge thy law, and nothing can...."—"Thou art a blasphemer," said Blanca, "let us depart hence."

Leaning on the arm of the Moor, she proceeded to the fountain of the Twelve Lions, which gives its name to one of the courts of the Alhambra. "Stranger," said the artless Spanish maiden, "when I look at thy robe, thy turban, and thy arms, and think of our loves, I fancy I see the shade of the handsome Abencerrage walking in this forsaken retreat with the unfortunate Alfayma. Explain to me the Arabic inscription which is engraved on the marble of this fountain."

Aben-Hamet read these words:

The beautiful princess who walks, covered with pearls, in her garden, adds to the beauty of it so prodigiously. . . .[1] The rest of the inscription was effaced.

"It is for thee that this inscription was made," said Aben-Hamet. "Beloved Sultana, these palaces have never been so beautiful in their youth, as they now are in their ruins. Listen to the murmur of the fountains, the waters of which have been turned from their course by the moss: look at the gardens, which we see through these half-ruined arcades; contemplate the star of day, which is setting beyond all these porticoes; how sweet it is to wander with thee in these abodes! Thy words embalm these retreats like the roses of Hymen. With what delight do I discover, in thy speech, some of the accents of the language of my fathers! The mere rustling of thy dress on these marbles makes me thrill. The air is only perfumed because it has touched thy tresses. Beautiful art thou as the genius of my country in the midst of these ruins! But can Aben-Hamet hope to fix thy heart? What is he, when compared to thee! He has roamed over the mountains with his father; he knows the plants of the desert. . . . Alas! there is not one of them that can heal the wound which thou hast given him! . . . He carries arms, but he is not a knight.

[1] This inscription, as well as several others, is still existing. It is needless to say that I wrote this description of the Alhambra on the spot.

I said to myself formerly: 'The water of the sea, which sleeps under shelter in the hollow of the rock, is tranquil and silent, while quite near the open sea is noisy and agitated: Aben-Hamet! such will be thy life, silent, peaceful and unheard of, in an unknown corner of the earth, while the court of the Sultan is overturned by storms!' I said so to myself, young Christian, and thou hast proved to me that the tempest may also disturb the drop of water in the hollow of the rock."

Blanca listened with delight to a language which was so new to her, and the oriental turn of which seemed so much in harmony with this fairy abode, which she rambled over with her lover. Love penetrated her heart in all directions: she felt her knees sink under her, and was obliged to lean more heavily on the arm of her companion. Aben-Hamet supported the sweet burden, and repeated as he walked along: "Ah! why am I not an illustrious Abencerrage!"

"Thou wouldst please me less," said Blanca, "for I should be more unhappy; remain in obscurity and live for me. A brave knight often forgets love for glory."

"Thou wouldst not have that danger to apprehend," replied Aben-Hamet with quickness.

"And how wouldst thou love me then, if thou wert an Abencerrage?" demanded the descendant of Ximena.

"I would love thee more than glory, and less than honour!" was the answer of the Moor.

The sun had sunk beneath the horizon during the promenade of the two lovers; they had traversed the whole of the Alhambra. What recollections were presented by it to the mind of Aben-Hamet! Here the Sultana received, by means of air-holes, the smoke of the perfumes which were burnt under her; there, in that secluded retreat, she adorned herself with the glorious attire of the East. And it was Blanca, it was a beloved woman, who related all these details to the handsome youth whom she idolized.

The rising moon diffused her doubtful light in the forsaken sanctuaries and in the deserted courts of the Alhambra; her silver rays outlined, upon the green turf of the gardens, and upon the walls of the apartments, the lace-work of an aerial architecture, the arches of the cloisters, the flitting shadows of the spouting waters, and those of the shrubs agitated by the zephyr. The nightingale sang in a cypress which pierced the domes of a ruined mosque, and the echoes repeated her plaintive strains. By the light of the moon, Aben-Hamet wrote the name of Blanca on the marble of the Hall of the Two Sisters; he traced it in Arabic characters, in order that the traveller might find an additional mystery for the exercise of his conjectures in this palace of mysteries.

"Moor," said Blanca, "these amusements are cruel; let us quit this spot. The destiny of my life is fixed for ever. Bear well in mind those words: 'Mussulman, I am thy mistress without hope; Christian, I am thy fortunate wife.'"

Aben-Hamet answered: "Christian, I am thy despairing slave; Mussulman, I am thy proud husband."

And these noble lovers departed from this dangerous palace.

The passion of Blanca increased every day, and that of Aben-Hamet became equally violent. He was so transported at the idea of being loved for his own sake, and of owing the sentiments which he had inspired to no foreign cause, that he did not disclose the secret of his birth to the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé: he pictured to himself a delicate pleasure in giving her the information that he bore an illustrious name, on the very day when she consented to give him her hand. But he was suddenly recalled to Tunis. His mother had been attacked by an incurable disease, and wished to embrace and bless her son before her death. Aben-Hamet presented himself at the palace of Blanca. "Sultana," said he to her, "my mother is at the point of death. She

has sent for me to close her eyes. Wilt thou continue to love me?"

"Thou leavest me then," replied Blanca, turning pale; "shall I never see thee more?"

"Come with me," said Aben-Hamet; "I wish to exact an oath of thee, and to give thee one in return, which death alone can break. Follow me."

They go out; they reach a cemetery which was formerly that of the Moors. Here and there were still to be seen little funeral columns round which the sculptor had formerly figured a turban; but which the Christians had subsequently replaced by a cross. Aben-Hamet led Blanca to the foot of these columns.

"Blanca," said he, "this is the place where my ancestors repose; I swear by their ashes to love thee until the day when the angel of judgement shall summon me to the tribunal of Allah. I promise thee never to engage my heart to another woman, and to take thee for my wife, as soon as thou shalt know the divine light of the prophet. Every year, at this period, I will return to Granada, to see if thou hast kept thy faith to me, and if thou wilt renounce thy errors."

"And I," said Blanca, in tears, "will expect thee every year; I will preserve, until my latest sigh, the faith which I have sworn to thee; and I will receive thee for my husband, when the God of the Christians, more powerful than thy mistress, shall have melted thy infidel heart."

Aben-Hamet departs, the winds carry him to the African shores. His mother had just expired. He weeps for her; he embraces her coffin. The months roll by; sometimes wandering amid the ruins of Carthage, sometimes seated on the tomb of St. Louis, the banished Abencerrage longs for the day which is to carry him back to Granada. That day at last arrives: Aben-Hamet embarks, and the vessel directs her course to Malaga. With what transport, with what joy mixed with appre-

hension, did he descry the first promontories of Spain! Is Blanca awaiting him on these shores? Does she still remember the poor Arab, who has never ceased to adore her under the palm-tree of the desert?

The daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé was not unfaithful to her vows. She had requested her father to convey her to Malaga. From the mountain-tops which bordered the uninhabited coast, she followed with her eyes the distant vessels and the flying sails. During the tempest, she contemplated with alarm the sea, as it was raised into fury by the winds. Then it was that she loved to lose herself in the clouds, to expose herself in dangerous passages, to feel herself washed by the same waves, or carried along by the same hurricane which threatened the days of Aben-Hamet. As she saw the plaintive seamew skim the waves with her large crooked wings, and fly towards the shores of Africa, she charged her with all the love-messages and extravagant wishes which proceed from a heart devoured by passion.

One day, while wandering on the beach, she discovered a long vessel, whose elevated prow, bent mast, and triangular sail announced the elegant genius of the Moors. Blanca ran to the port, into which she soon saw the Barbary vessel enter, making the sea foam under her rapid course. A Moor, most superbly dressed, was standing on the prow. Behind him, two black slaves held by the bridle an Arabian horse, whose smoking nostrils and dishevelled mane indicated both his natural ardour, and the terror with which the noise of the waves affected him. The bark arrives, lowers her sails, touches the pier, and lays to her side; the Moor springs upon the shore, which re-echoes with the sound of his arms. The slaves disembark the leopard-spotted courser, which neighs and leaps with joy at once more finding himself on land. Other slaves lower, with great care, a basket in which lay a gazelle amid palm-tree leaves; her delicate limbs were fastened and doubled under her, for fear of

their being broken by the movement of the vessel; she wore a collar of aloe berries, and upon the gold plate, which served to connect the two ends of the collar, were engraved in Arabic a name and a talisman.

Blanca recognized Aben-Hamet; fearful of betraying herself in the presence of the crowd, she retired, and sent Dorothea, one of her attendants, to inform the Abencerrage, that she was waiting for him at the palace of the Moors. Aben-Hamet was at that moment presenting to the governor his firman, written in blue characters on beautiful vellum, and rolled up in a silk case. Dorothea approached, and conducted the happy Abencerrage to the feet of Blanca. What transports, when they found that both had remained faithful! What happiness in seeing each other after having been so long separated! How many fresh vows of eternal affection!

The two black slaves bring the Numidian courser, which, in place of a saddle, had only a lion's skin thrown over his back and fastened by a purple belt. Afterwards the gazelle was introduced. "Sultana," said Aben-Hamet, "this is a deer of my country, almost as light-footed as thyself." Blanca, with her own hands, untied the beautiful animal, which seemed to thank her, by looks of the sweetest expression. During the absence of the Abencerrage, the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé had been studying Arabic; she read, with tearful eyes, her own name engraved on the gazelle's collar. The animal, on being restored to her liberty, could scarcely stand upon her feet, from their having been so long tied up; she laid herself down upon the ground, and leaned her head against the knees of her mistress. Blanca gave her some fresh dates, and caressed this doe of the desert, whose fine coat retained the perfume of the aloe wood and of the rose of Tunis.

The Abencerrage, the Duke of Santa Fé and his daughter departed together for Granada. The days of the happy lovers passed like those of the preceding year:

the same walks, the same regret at the sight of his country, the same love, or rather love always increasing, and always mutual; but also the same attachment in the two lovers to the religion of their fathers. "Become a Christian," said Blanca;—"Become a Mussulman," said Aben-Hamet, and they separated once more, without giving way to the passion which attracted them to each other.

Aben-Hamet reappeared the third year, like those birds of passage, which love brings back to our climates in the spring. This time he found not Blanca on the shore; but a letter from that adored woman informed the faithful Arab of the departure of the Duke for Madrid, and the arrival of Don Carlos at Granada. The latter was accompanied by a French prisoner, friend of Blanca's brother. The Moor's heart sunk within him at the perusal of this letter. He set out from Malaga for Granada with the most melancholy forebodings; the mountains appeared to him frightfully solitary: and he several times turned round to look at the sea which he had just crossed.

Blanca, during her father's absence, had been unable to quit a brother whom she loved, a brother who intended to divest himself of all his property in her favour, and whom she saw again after seven years' absence. Don Carlos possessed all the courage and all the pride of his nation: terrible as the conquerors of the New World, in whose ranks he had first carried arms; religious like the Spanish knights who conquered the Moors, he cherished in his heart that hatred of the infidels which he inherited from the blood of the Cid.

Thomas de Lautrec, of the illustrious house of Foix, in which beauty in the females and bravery in the males were regarded as hereditary qualities, was the younger brother of the Countess de Foix, and of the brave and unfortunate Odet de Foix, Lord of Lautrec. At the age of eighteen, Thomas had been knighted by Bayard, in

that retreat which cost the life of the knight without fear and without reproach. Some time after, Thomas was pierced with wounds and made prisoner at Pavia, while defending the chivalrous monarch, who then lost all, except his honour.

Don Carlos de Bivar, who was a witness of the gallantry of Lautrec, had caused care to be taken of the wounds of the young Frenchman, and there was speedily formed between them one of those heroic friendships, of which esteem and virtue are the foundations. Francis I. had returned to France, but Charles V. detained the other prisoners. Lautrec had had the honour to share his sovereign's captivity, and to lie at his feet in prison. Having remained in Spain, after the departure of his king, he had been handed over on his parole to Don Carlos, who had just brought him to Granada.

When Aben-Hamet presented himself at the palace of Don Rodrigo, and the door of the apartment in which was the Duke of Santa Fé's daughter was opened, he experienced torments hitherto unknown to him. At the feet of Donna Blanca was seated a young man, who was looking at her in silence with a species of transport. This young man wore breeches made of buffalo's skin, and a doublet of the same colour, fastened by a belt from which was suspended a sword with fleurs-de-lis. A silk mantle was thrown over his shoulders, and his head was covered with a narrow-brimmed hat, surmounted with feathers. A lace ruff, falling back on his bosom, allowed his neck to be seen. A pair of moustaches, black as ebony, gave a masculine and warlike air to a countenance naturally mild. To his large boots, which fell down and doubled over his feet, were attached golden spurs, the marks of knightly quality.

At some distance, another knight was standing, leaning on the iron cross of his long sword; he was dressed like his companion, but seemed rather older. His austere look, though at the same time ardent and passionate,

inspired respect and awe. The red cross of Calatrava was embroidered on his doublet with this device: *For it and for my king.*

When Blanca perceived Aben-Hamet, she uttered an involuntary cry. "Knights," said she immediately, "this is the infidel of whom I have said so much to you; take care he does not bear away the victory. The Abencerrages were just like him, and they were surpassed by none in loyalty, courage and gallantry."

Don Carlos advanced to meet Aben-Hamet. "Señor Moor," said he, "my father and sister have informed me of your name. They believe you are of a noble and brave race: you are yourself distinguished for your courtesy. My master Charles V. must soon commence war against Tunis, and we shall, I hope, meet each other in the field of honour."

Aben-Hamet placed his hand upon his bosom, seated himself upon the ground without answering, and remained with his eyes fixed upon Blanca and upon Lautrec. The latter was admiring, with the curiosity peculiar to his countrymen, the handsome countenance of the Moor, his noble dress and his brilliant armour. Blanca displayed not the slightest embarrassment: her soul was completely exhibited in her eyes; the ingenuous Spaniard made no attempt to conceal the secret of her heart. After a silence of a few moments, Aben-Hamet rose, made his bow to the daughter of Don Rodrigo, and retired. Astonished at the behaviour of the Moor, and at the looks of Blanca, Lautrec left the apartment, with a suspicion which was speedily changed into certainty.

Don Carlos remained alone with his sister. "Blanca," said he, "explain yourself. Whence this trouble which the sight of this stranger has occasioned you?"

"Brother," answered Blanca, "I love Aben-Hamet, and, if he will become a Christian, my hand is his."

"What!" exclaimed Don Carlos, "you love Aben-

Hamet! the daughter of the Bivars love a Moor, an infidel, an enemy, whom we have driven from these palaces!"

"Don Carlos," replied Blanca, "I love Aben-Hamet; Aben-Hamet loves me; for three years he has renounced me, sooner than renounce the religion of his forefathers. He possesses nobility, honour and knighthood: to my last breath I will adore him."

Don Carlos was capable of estimating, in its fullest extent, the generous resolution of Aben-Hamet, although he lamented the infatuation of that infidel. "Unfortunate Blanca," said he, "whither will this passion lead thee? I had hoped that my friend Lautrec would become my brother."

"Thou deceivedst thyself," said Blanca, "I cannot love that stranger. As to my feelings for Aben-Hamet, I am accountable to no one. Keep thy knightly vows, as I shall keep my vows of love. For thy comfort, be assured of this, that Blanca will never become the wife of an infidel."

"Our family will then disappear from the earth!" said Don Carlos.

"It is thy business to revive it," said Blanca. "Besides, of what consequence are sons whom thou wilt never see, and who will degenerate from thy virtues? Don Carlos, I feel that we are the last of our race; we are too much out of the common order to expect that our blood should flourish after us. The Cid was our ancestor: he will be our posterity;" so saying she quitted the apartment.

Don Carlos flew to the Abencerrage. "Moor," said he, "renounce my sister, or meet me in single combat."

"Art thou entrusted by thy sister," said Aben-Hamet, "to reclaim the vows which she has made to me?"

"No," replied Don Carlos, "she loves thee more than ever."

"Ah! worthy brother of Blanca!" exclaimed Aben-Hamet, interrupting him, "I must derive all my

happiness from thy noble blood! O fortunate Aben-Hamet! O happy day! I believed that Blanca was unfaithful for this French knight. . ."

"That is thy misfortune!" angrily exclaimed Don Carlos in his turn, "Lautrec is my friend; but for thee, he would be my brother. You must give me satisfaction for the tears which you make my family shed."

"I am contented to do so," answered Aben-Hamet, "but although I am sprung from a family, which has probably combated thine, I am not a knight. I see no one here to confer upon me that order, which will allow thee to measure thy strength with mine, without degrading thy rank."

Struck with the Moor's observation, Don Carlos looked at him with a mixture of admiration and rage. Then all at once, "I myself will dub thee knight! thou art worthy of it."

Aben-Hamet bent his knee to Don Carlos. The latter gave him the accolade, by striking him three times on the shoulder with the flat side of his sword; afterwards, he girded on him the same sword which the Abencerrage, perhaps, was about to plunge into his bosom. Such was ancient honour.

Both of them immediately sprang upon their coursers, got beyond the walls of Granada, and flew to the Fountain of the Pine. The duels between the Moors and Christians had for a long time given celebrity to this spring. It was there that Malek Alabes had fought with Ponce de Leon, and the Grand Master of Calatrava had killed the brave Abayados. The fragments of the armour of this Moorish knight were still seen suspended from the branches of the pine, and on the bark of the tree some letters of a funeral inscription were still legible. Don Carlos pointed out with his hand, to the Abencerrage, the tomb of Abayados. "Imitate," said he to him, "that brave infidel, and receive baptism and death from my hand."

"Death perhaps," answered Aben-Hamet, "but Allah and the Prophet for ever!"

They immediately proceeded to take their ground, and rushed against each other with fury. They were only provided with swords: Aben-Hamet was much less skilful than Don Carlos in combat, but the excellence of his arms, which had been tempered at Damascus, and the fleetness of his Arabian steed, gave him an advantage over his enemy. He gave the reins to his courser in the Moorish manner, and with his large sharp stirrup cut the right leg of Don Carlos's horse under the knee. The wounded animal fell to the ground, and Don Carlos, dismounted by this fortunate blow, marched against Aben-Hamet, bearing his sword aloft. Aben-Hamet sprang to the ground, and met Don Carlos with intrepidity; he warded off the first blows of the Spaniard, who broke his sword against the Damascus blade; twice disappointed by fortune, Don Carlos shed tears of rage, and called out to his enemy: "Strike, Moor, strike; Don Carlos, although disarmed, defies thee, thee and all thy infidel race."

"Thou mightest have slain me," replied the Abencerrage, "but I never thought of giving thee the slightest wound. I only wished to prove to thee that I was worthy of being thy brother, and to prevent thee from despising me."

At that instant, they perceived a cloud of dust: it was Lautrec and Blanca, who were spurring on two mares of Fez, fleeter than the wind. On arriving at the Fountain of the Pine, they saw the combat suspended.

"I am vanquished," said Don Carlos, "this knight has given me my life. Lautrec, you will perhaps be more fortunate than I?"

"My wounds," replied Lautrec, in a noble and dignified tone of voice, "allow me to decline the combat with this courteous knight. I have no wish," added he, with a blush, "to learn the subject of your quarrel, or to

penetrate a secret which would probably be a death-blow to myself; my absence will speedily cause peace to be restored between you, at least unless it be Blanca's orders that I should remain at her feet."

"Sir knight," said Blanca, "you must remain with my brother: you must look upon me as your sister. The hearts of all present are suffering deeply; you will learn from us to bear the ills of life."

Blanca wished to constrain the three knights to shake each other's hands; all three refused to do so. "I hate Aben-Hamet," exclaimed Don Carlos. "I envy him," said Lautrec. "And I," said the Abencerrage, "I esteem Don Carlos, and I pity Lautrec; but I can love neither of them."

"Let us continue to see each other," said Blanca, "and sooner or later friendship will follow esteem. Let the fatal event which has brought us here be for ever unknown at Granada."

From that moment Aben-Hamet became a thousand times dearer to the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé: love delights in valour. Nothing was now wanting to the Abencerrage, since he had shown himself brave, and Don Carlos owed his life to him. Aben-Hamet, by the advice of Blanca, abstained from appearing at the palace for several days, to allow the wrath of Don Carlos time to cool. A mixture of mild and bitter feelings filled the soul of the Abencerrage; if, on the one hand, the certainty of being loved with so much fidelity and ardour was to him an inexhaustible source of delight; on the other, the certainty of never being happy without renouncing the religion of his fathers weighed heavily on the courage of Aben-Hamet. Years had already elapsed without bringing any relief to his sufferings: should he see the rest of his life pass away in the same manner?

He was plunged into an abyss of the most serious and tender reflections, when one evening he heard the bell

ringing for that Christian prayer which announces the close of the day. It struck him that he would enter into the temple of the God of Blanca, and ask further counsel of the Master of Nature.

He set out; he arrived at the door of an ancient mosque, which had been converted into a church by the faithful. With a heart pierced by sorrow and feelings of devotion, he penetrated into the temple which was formerly that of his God and of his country. Prayers were just ended: there was no longer any one in the church. A holy obscurity prevailed amid the multitude of columns, which resembled the trunks of trees of a regularly planted forest. The light architecture of the Arabs was here married to the Gothic architecture, and, without losing anything of its elegance, it had assumed a gravity better adapted to meditation. A few lamps scarcely gave light to the hollows of the vaults; but, by the brightness of several lighted tapers, the altar of the sanctuary was still conspicuous: it glittered with gold and precious stones. The Spaniards glory in stripping themselves of their riches, in order to decorate with them the objects of their worship; and the image of the living God, placed in the midst of lace veils, of crowns of pearls, and bunches of rubies, receives the adoration of a half-naked people.

Not a seat was to be seen in the whole extent of this vast area: a marble pavement, which covered coffins, served the great as well as the little, to prostrate themselves before the Lord. Aben-Hamet walked slowly up the deserted naves, which re-echoed with the solitary noise of his footsteps. His mind was divided between the recollections which this ancient edifice of the Moorish religion recalled to his memory, and the feelings to which the religion of the Christians gave birth in his heart. He distinguished at the foot of a column a motionless figure, which he at first mistook for a statue on a tomb. On approaching it, he distinguished a

young knight on his knees, with his forehead reverently bent, and his arms crossed upon his bosom. This knight made not the slightest movement at the noise of Aben-Hamet's steps; no mental wandering, no external sign of life disturbed his deep prayer; his sword was laid on the ground before him, and his plumed hat was placed by his side on the marble: he had the appearance of being fixed in that attitude from the effect of some enchantment. Aben-Hamet recognized Lautrec. "Ah!" said the Abencerrage to himself, "this young and handsome Frenchman is asking some signal favour of heaven; this warrior, so celebrated for his courage, is here laying his heart bare to the Sovereign of Heaven, as the humblest and the most obscure of men! Let me also pray to the God of knights and of glory."

Aben-Hamet was about to prostrate himself upon the marble, when he perceived, by the glimmering of a lamp, some Arabic characters and a verse of the Koran, which appeared upon a half-ruined tablet. His heart again felt the pangs of remorse; and he made haste to quit a building in which he had entertained the idea of becoming a traitor to his religion and his country.

The cemetery which surrounded this ancient mosque was a species of garden, planted with orange, cypress and palm-trees, and watered by two fountains; a cloister went all round it. Aben-Hamet, in passing under one of the porticoes, perceived a female about to enter the church. Although she was wrapped up in a veil, the Abencerrage recognized the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé; he stopped her, and said to her: "Dost thou come to seek Lautrec in this temple?"

"Dismiss this vulgar jealousy," replied Blanca, "if I no longer loved thee, I would tell thee so: I would scorn to deceive thee. I come here to pray for thee. Thou alone art now the object of my wishes. I forget my own soul for thine. Thou shouldst not have intoxicated me with the poison of thy love, or thou shouldst

have consented to serve the God whom I serve. Thou disturbest my whole family; my brother hates thee, my father is overwhelmed with vexation, because I refuse to marry. Dost thou not see how much my health suffers? Behold this enchanted asylum of death: here I shall soon be laid, if thou dost not hasten to receive my vows at the foot of the Christian altar. The struggles which I endure are gradually undermining my existence; the passion, with which thou hast inspired me, will not always support this feeble frame. Remember, oh Moor, to speak to thee in thy own language, that the flame which lights the torch is also the fire which consumes it."

Blanca entered the church, and left Aben-Hamet confounded with her last words.

The struggle is ended; the Abencerrage is vanquished; he is about to renounce the errors of his faith; he has struggled long enough; the dread of seeing Blanca perish triumphs over every other feeling in the breast of Aben-Hamet. "After all," said he to himself, "perhaps the God of the Christians is the true God? This God is always the deity of noble souls, since he is the God of Blanca, of Don Carlos, and of Lautrec."

Full of this idea, Aben-Hamet waited with impatience for the following day, to inform Blanca of his resolution, and to convert a life of sorrow and of tears into one of joy and happiness; he was unable, however, to repair to the palace of the Duke of Santa Fé until the evening. He learned that Blanca was gone with her brother to the Generalife, where Lautrec was giving an entertainment. Agitated by fresh suspicions, Aben-Hamet flies upon the traces of Blanca. Lautrec blushed at seeing the Abencerrage appear so suddenly; as to Don Carlos, he received the Moor with cool politeness, through which esteem was perceptible.

Lautrec had caused a collation to be served up of the finest fruits of Spain and of Africa, in one of the apartments of the Generalife, styled the *Hall of the Knights.*

All round this hall were suspended the portraits of the princes and knights, who had conquered the Moors, —of Pelayo, the Cid, Gonzalvo de Cordova; and the sword of the last king of Granada was hung under these portraits. Aben-Hamet did not allow the internal pain which he felt to appear, and only said, like the lion, on looking at these portraits, "We know not how to paint."

The generous Lautrec, who saw the eyes of the Abencerrage turned involuntarily towards the sword of Boabdil, said to him, "Knight of the Moors, had I anticipated the honour of your presence at this fête, I would not have received you here. One loses a sword every day, and I have seen the bravest of monarchs deliver up his to his fortunate enemy."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Moor, hiding his face with a corner of his robe, "one might lose it like Francis I., but like Boabdil!..."

Night came on, lights were brought, and the conversation took another turn. Don Carlos was requested to relate the discovery of Mexico. He spoke of that unknown world with the pompous eloquence which is natural to the Spanish nation. He related the misfortunes of Montezuma, the manners of the Americans, the prodigies of Spanish valour, and even the cruelties of his countrymen, which did not, in his eyes, seem to deserve either praise or blame.

These narratives delighted Aben-Hamet, whose passion for marvellous tales betrayed his Arabian blood. When it came to his turn, he gave a picture of the Ottoman empire, newly established on the ruins of Constantinople, bestowing a tribute of passing regret to the first empire of Mahomet; the happy days when the Commander of the Faithful saw shining around him Zobeide, Flower of Beauty, Jalib al Koolloob, Fetnah and the generous Ganem, Love's Slave. As to Lautrec, he painted the

gallant court of Francis I., the arts reviving from the midst of barbarism, the honour, the loyalty, the chivalry of the olden time, joined to the politeness of civilized ages, the Gothic turrets ornamented with the Grecian orders, and the French ladies setting off their rich dresses with Athenian elegance.

After this conversation, Lautrec, wishing to amuse the divinity of the entertainment, took his guitar, and sang this romance[1] which he had composed to one of the mountain airs of his country:

Oft to my birthplace mem'ry's glance
Will turn, and my rapt soul entrance!
Sister, how sweet the minutes rolled
In France!
My country! thee more dear I hold
Than gold.

Rememb'rest thou how to her breast
Our mother both her children prest,
And how her bright white locks would glister?
How blest!
While we with lips of love, sweet sister!
Kiss'd her.

Rememb'rest thou that castle dear,
By which the swift stream flowed; and near,
That Moorish tow'r, with age so worn,
From where
The trumpet sounded when the morn
Was born?

Rememb'rest thou that tranquil lake
Which the swift swallow skimmed to slake
His thirst; where zephyr the sweet rose
Would shake;
And Sol's last rays at evening's close
Repose?

[1] The public is already acquainted with this romance. I composed the words for an air of the mountains of Auvergne, remarkable for its sweetness and simplicity.

Oh! who my Helen back will yield,
My native hill, my oak-crowned field?
Their mem'ry keeps my heart-wounds old
Unhealed;
My country! thee more dear I'll hold
Than gold.

As he finished the last couplet, Lautrec, with his glove, brushed away the tear which the recollection of the gentle land of France extorted from him. The regret of the handsome prisoner was warmly participated by Aben-Hamet, who deplored as well as Lautrec the loss of his country. When requested to take the guitar in his turn, he excused himself, by saying that he only knew one romance, which would not be at all agreeable to Christian ears.

"If it is a song of the infidels smarting under our victories," said Don Carlos scornfully, "you may sing it; tears are allowed to the vanquished."

"Yes," said Blanca, "and that is the reason why our ancestors, while they were under the Moorish yoke, have left us so many *complaints*."

Aben-Hamet then sang this ballad, which he had learned from a poet of the tribe of the Abencerrages.[1]

[1] In crossing the mountainous country between Algeciras and Cadiz, I halted at a *venta* situated in the midst of a wood. I found there only a little boy of fourteen or fifteen, and a little girl of nearly the same age, brother and sister, who were sitting by the fireside and twisting mats. They sang a romance, the words of which I did not understand, but the air was simple and naïve. The weather was dreadfully stormy, and I remained two hours at the *venta*. My juvenile hosts repeated so frequently the couplets of their romance, that it was easy for me to get the air by heart. To this air I composed the romance of the Abencerrage. Perhaps Aben-Hamet was mentioned in the romance of my two little Spaniards. I may add that the dialogue of Granada and the king of Leon is imitated from a Spanish romance.

As Royal John
Rode out one day,
Granada's town
Before him lay,
With sudden start,
"Fair town," said he,
"My hand and heart
I give to thee.

"Thee will I wive,
And to thee will
Cordova give,
And proud Seville.
Robes rich and fair,
And jewels fine,
Shall all declare
My love is thine."

Granada cried,
"Great Leon's king!
I'm the Moor's bride,
I wear his ring.
So keep thy own;
The gems I wear
Are a gorgeous zone,
And children dear."

Thou promis'd'st thus,
But kept'st not well.
O woe for us!
Granada fell.
A Christian base,
Abencerrage,
Rules thy birthplace;
'Twas in Fate's page.

To that tomb ne'er,
The pool so near,
Shall camel bear
Medina's seer.
A Christian base,
Abencerrage,
Rules thy birthplace;
'Twas in Fate's page.

Alhambra's tow'rs !
Palace of God !
Town of fair flow'rs
And fountains broad !
A Christian base,
Abencerrage,
Rules thy birthplace ;
'Twas in Fate's page.

The plaintive artlessness of this lament affected even the proud Don Carlos, notwithstanding the imprecations it pronounced against the Christians. He would have wished to be excused from singing himself, but, out of courtesy to Lautrec, he felt obliged to yield to his entreaties. Aben-Hamet handed the guitar to Blanca's brother, who celebrated the exploits of the Cid, his illustrious ancestor.[1]

Bright in his mail, with love and valour fired,
The Cid, about to part for Afric's war,
Stretched at Ximena's feet, as love inspired,
Thus sung his parting to the sweet guitar :

"My love hath said : Go forth and meet the Moor,
Return victorious from the well-fought field ;
Yes ! I shall then believe thou canst adore,
If, at my wish, thy love to honour yield !

"Then give to me my helmet and my spear !
In bloody fight the Cid his love shall prove,

[1] All the world knows the air of the *Follies of Spain.* This air had no words, at least none which expressed its grave, religious and chivalrous character. This character I have endeavoured to give in the romance of the Cid. This romance, having got into the hands of the public without my consent, some celebrated masters did me the honour to set it to music. But, as I had expressly composed it for the air of the *Follies of Spain*, one of the couplets becomes complete nonsense, unless, reference is had to my original intention.

My song shall be a nobler theme than thine,
Ere long it will become *the folly of Spain*, etc.

In short, these three romances have little other merit than their adaptation to three old airs of undoubted nationality : besides this, they bring on the *dénouement* of the story.

Amidst the din of war the Moor shall hear
His battle-cry, 'My honour and my love!'

"O gallant Moor, vaunt not thy tuneful strain,
My song shall be a nobler theme than thine,
Ere long it will become the folly of Spain,
As one where love with honour doth combine.

"Oft in my native valleys shall be heard
In the old Christians' mouth Rodrigo's name,
Who nobly to inglorious life preferred
His God, his king, his honour, and his flame."

Don Carlos appeared so proud in singing these words, in a masculine and sonorous voice, that he might have been taken for the Cid himself. Lautrec shared the warlike enthusiasm of his friend; but the Abencerrage had turned pale at the name of the Cid.

"This knight," said he, "whom the Christians denominate the Flower of Battles, bears with us the name of the Cruel. Had his generosity but equalled his valour!..."

"His generosity," said Don Carlos, interrupting Aben-Hamet, warmly, "was even greater than his courage, and none but a Moor would calumniate the hero to whom my family owes its birth."

"What sayest thou?" exclaimed Aben-Hamet, springing up from the seat on which he lay half reclined: "dost thou reckon the Cid among thy ancestors?"

"His blood flows in my veins," replied Don Carlos, "and I recognize my possession of that noble blood by the hatred with which my heart burns against the foes of my God."

"It follows then," said Aben-Hamet, looking at Blanca, "that you belong to the family of the Bivars who, after the conquest of Granada, invaded the possessions of the unfortunate Abencerrages, and put to death an ancient knight of that name, who attempted to defend the tomb of his forefathers."

"Moor!" exclaimed Don Carlos, inflamed with rage,

"know that I do not suffer myself to be interrogated. If I now possess the spoils of the Abencerrages, my ancestors acquired them at the price of their blood, and to their sword only do they owe them."

"Only one word more," said Aben-Hamet, with constantly increasing emotion; "we knew not in our exile that the Bivars had the title of Santa Fé, and it was this which was the cause of my error."

"It was on the same Bivar," answered Don Carlos, "who conquered the Abencerrages, that this title was conferred by Ferdinand the Catholic."

The head of Aben-Hamet declined upon his bosom; he remained standing in the midst of Don Carlos, Lautrec and Blanca, who looked at him with astonishment. Two floods of tears gushed from his eyes upon the poniard which was fastened to his girdle. "Pardon me," he said, "men ought not, I know, to shed tears; from this time mine will no longer flow externally, although I have many more to shed: listen to me.

"Blanca! my love for thee equals the ardour of the burning winds of Arabia. I was conquered: I could no longer live without thee. Yesterday the sight of this French knight at his prayers, and thy words in the cemetery of the temple, had made me resolve to know thy God, and to pledge thee my faith."

A movement of joy from Blanca, and of surprise from Don Carlos, interrupted Aben-Hamet; Lautrec covered his face with both hands. The Moor divined his thoughts, and shaking his head with an agonizing smile said, "Knight, lose not all hope; as to thee, Blanca, weep for ever over the last of the Abencerrages."

Blanca, Don Carlos and Lautrec all three lifted up their hands to heaven, and exclaimed, "The last of the Abencerrages!"

There was a moment of silence; fear, hope, hatred, love, astonishment and jealousy agitated their different hearts: Blanca shortly fell upon her knees: "Gracious

God!" she said, "thou hast justified my choice; I could only love the descendant of heroes!"

"Sister!" said the irritated Don Carlos, "you forget that you are here in the presence of Lautrec."

"Don Carlos," said Aben-Hamet, "suspend thy wrath: it is my business to restore thee to repose." Then, addressing himself to Blanca, who had again taken her seat:

"Houri of heaven, Genie of love and of beauty, Aben-Hamet will be thy slave to his latest breath; but hear the full extent of his misfortune. The old man who was immolated by thy ancestor, while defending his home, was the father of my father; learn also a secret which I concealed from thee, or rather which thou madest me forget. When I came for the first time to visit this sorrowful country, my first object was to find out some descendant of the Bivars whom I might call to account for the blood which his fathers had shed."

"Well then," said Blanca, in a voice of grief, but sustained by the accent of a great soul, "what is thy resolution?"

"The only one which is worthy of thee," answered Aben-Hamet: "to restore thee thy vows, to satisfy by my eternal absence, and by my death, what we both of us owe to the enmity of our Gods, of our countries, and of our families. Should my image ever be blotted out from thy heart; if time, which destroys everything, should erase from thy memory the recollection of Abencerrage . . . this French knight. . . Thou owest this sacrifice to thy brother."

Lautrec started up impetuously, and threw himself into the arms of the Moor. "Aben-Hamet," he cried, "think not to outdo me in generosity; I am a Frenchman; I was knighted by Bayard; I have shed my blood for my king; I will be like my sponsor and my prince, without fear and without reproach. Shouldst thou remain with us, I will entreat Don Carlos to bestow upon

thee the hand of his sister; if thou quittest Granada, never shall thy mistress be troubled with a whisper of my love. Thou shalt not carry with thee into thy exile the fatal idea that Lautrec was insensible to thy virtues, and sought to take advantage of thy misfortune."

And the young knight pressed the Moor to his bosom with the warmth and vivacity of a Frenchman.

"Knights," said Don Carlos in his turn, "I expected nothing less from the illustrious races to which ye belong. Aben-Hamet, by what mark can I recognize you for the last Abencerrage?"

"By my conduct," replied Aben-Hamet.

"I admire it," said the Spaniard; "but, before I explain myself, shew me some proof of your birth."

Aben-Hamet took from his bosom the hereditary ring of the Abencerrages, which he wore suspended from a golden chain.

At sight of this, Don Carlos stretched out his hand to the unfortunate Aben-Hamet. "Sir knight," said he, "I regard you as a man of honour, and the real descendant of kings. You honour me by your plans connected with my family; I accept the combat which you came privately to seek. If I am conquered, all my property, which formerly belonged to your family, shall be faithfully restored to you. If you have renounced your intention to fight, accept in turn the offer which I make to you: become a Christian, and receive the hand of my sister, which Lautrec has solicited for you."

The temptation was great; but it was not beyond the strength of Aben-Hamet. If all-powerful love pleaded strongly in the heart of the Abencerrage; on the other hand, he could not think but with terror of uniting the blood of the persecutors with that of the persecuted. He fancied he saw the shade of his ancestor rising from the tomb, and reproaching him with this sacrilegious alliance. With a heart torn by grief, Aben-Hamet exclaimed: "Ah! why do I here meet with souls so

sublime, characters so generous, to make me feel more bitterly the value of what I lose! Let Blanca pronounce; let *her* say what I must do, in order to render myself more worthy of her love!"

"Return to the desert!" was the exclamation of Blanca, who immediately sunk to the earth in a swoon.

Aben-Hamet prostrated himself, adored Blanca even more than Heaven, and departed without uttering a word. The same night he set out for Malaga, and took his passage on board a vessel which was to touch at Oran. Near that city he found the caravan encamped which leaves Morocco every three years, crosses Africa, repairs to Egypt, and rejoins the caravan of Mecca in Yemen. Aben-Hamet joined it as one of the pilgrims.

Blanca's life was at first considered to be in danger, but she recovered. Faithful to the promise which he had given to the Abencerrage, Lautrec departed, and never did a word of his love or his sorrow trouble the melancholy of the daughter of the Duke of Santa Fé. Every year Blanca made a journey to Malaga, to wander on the mountains, at the period when her lover was accustomed to return from Africa; she seated herself upon the rocks, contemplated the sea, and the vessels in the distance, and afterwards returned to Granada: she passed the rest of her life amid the ruins of the Alhambra. She complained not; she wept not; she never spoke of Aben-Hamet; a stranger to her would have thought her happy. She was the only survivor of her family. Her father died of grief, and Don Carlos was killed in a duel, in which Lautrec acted as his second. What was the fate of Aben-Hamet no one ever knew.

In leaving Tunis, by the gate which leads to the ruins of Carthage, the traveller finds a cemetery; under a palm-tree, in a corner of this cemetery, a tomb was pointed out to me, which was called *the tomb of the last of the Abencerrages.* There is nothing remarkable about it;

the sepulchral stone is perfectly smooth; only, after a Moorish fashion, a slight hole has been excavated in the middle of it by the chisel. The rain-water which collects in the bottom of this funeral cup, serves, in a burning climate, to quench the thirst of the birds of the air.

THE PRISONERS OF THE CAUCASUS

COUNT XAVIER DE MAISTRE

THE Caucasian mountains have long been enclosed by the Russian empire without belonging to it. Their fierce inhabitants, cut off by language and by difference of interests, form a large number of petty tribes which have little political intercourse one with another, but which are all animated by the same love of independence and of plunder.

One of the most numerous and most formidable is that of the Tchetchens, who inhabit the great and the little Kabarda, provinces whose lofty valleys extend as far as the summits of the Caucasus. The men of this tribe are handsome, brave, and intelligent, but they are robbers and cruel, and in a continual state of war with the troops of "the line."[1]

In the midst of these dangerous hordes, and in the very centre of this immense chain of mountains, Russia has established a line of communication with her possessions in Asia. Redoubts, placed at intervals, protect the road as far as Georgia, but no traveller would dare to venture alone across the space separating them. Twice a week a convoy of infantry, with cannon and a considerable party of Cossacks, escorts travellers and government dispatches. One of these redoubts, situated at the outlet of the mountains, has become a village with a fair-

[1] By this name is designated the succession of stations guarded by Russian troops between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, from the mouth of the Terek to that of the Kuban.

sized population. Its position has caused it to receive the name of Vladikavkaz:[1] it is used as the residence of the commandant of the troops who perform the troublesome duty which has just been mentioned.

Major Kaskambo, of the Vologda regiment, a Russian nobleman, belonging to a family of Greek origin, was to go and take up the command of the station at Lars, in the gorges of the Caucasus. Impatient to reach his post, and brave to rashness, he had the imprudence to undertake this journey with the escort of some fifty Cossacks whom he commanded, and the still greater imprudence to talk of his plan and boast about it before it was carried out.

The Tchetchens who live near the frontiers, and are called "peaceful Tchetchens," are subject to Russia, and have in consequence free access to Mozdok; but most of them keep up friendly relations with the mountaineers and are very often partners in their robberies. These last, apprised of Kaskambo's journey and of the very day of his departure, proceeded in great numbers to the road by which he was to travel, and prepared an ambush for him. About twenty versts from Mozdok, at the turn of a little hill covered with brushwood, he was attacked by seven hundred mounted men. Retreat was impossible: the Cossacks dismounted and sustained the attack with great firmness, hoping to be relieved by the troops of a redoubt which was not far distant.

The inhabitants of the Caucasus, although individually very brave, are incapable of a concerted attack, and consequently are not very dangerous to a troop that presents a firm front; but they are well armed and take excellent aim. Their large numbers, on this occasion, made the fight too unequal. After a fairly long fusillade, more than half of the Cossacks were killed or disabled; the rest had made for themselves, with their dead horses, a

[1] Vladikavkaz comes from the Russian verb "vladeti," which means "command, dominate."

circular rampart, from behind which they fired their last cartridges. The Tchetchens, who are always accompanied in their expeditions by Russian deserters, whom they use if need arises as interpreters, made them shout to the Cossacks: "Surrender the major to us, or you will be killed to the last man." Kaskambo, foreseeing the certain loss of his men, resolved to surrender himself to save the lives of those who were left: he entrusted his sword to the Cossacks and advanced alone towards the Tchetchens, who ceased firing immediately, their aim being only to take him alive in order to obtain a ransom. He had scarcely given himself up to his enemies, when he saw appearing in the distance the relief that was being sent to him: it was too late: the brigands rapidly withdrew.

His "denshchik"[1] had stayed behind with the mule that carried the major's baggage. Hidden in a ravine, he was awaiting the issue of the fight, when the Cossacks found him and told him of his master's misfortune. The worthy servant at once determined to share his fate, and set out in the direction whither the Tchetchens had retreated, leading his mule with him, and following the track of the horses. When he began to lose it in the darkness, he met a straggler of the enemy, who conducted him to the Tchetchens' rendezvous.

One can imagine the feelings of the prisoner when he saw his denshchik come of his own accord to share his bad fortune. The Tchetchens at once divided amongst themselves the booty thus brought to them. They left to the major only a guitar which was with his baggage, and which they restored to him in mockery. Ivan (this was the denshchik's name)[2] seized upon it and refused to throw it away, as his master advised him. "Why

[1] Soldier-servant.

[2] He was called Ivan Smirnoff, a name which might be translated into French as "John the Gentile," which contrasted strangely with his character, as we shall see by what follows.

should we lose heart?" he said, "'the God of the Russians is great';[1] it is to the interest of the brigands to preserve you. They will do you no harm."

After a halt of some hours the horde were going to continue their march, when one of their men, who had just joined them, announced that the Russians were still advancing, and that probably the troops from the other redoubts would unite to pursue them. The chiefs held a council; it was a question of concealing their retreat, not only in order to keep their prisoner, but also to turn the enemy aside from their villages, and thus avoid reprisals. The horde dispersed by various roads. Ten men on foot were told off to conduct the prisoners, while about a hundred horsemen remained together, and marched in a different direction from that which Kaskambo was to take. They took away from the latter his nail-studded boots, which might have left a recognizable track on the ground, and forced him, as well as Ivan, to walk barefoot for a part of the morning.

Coming near a stream, the little escort followed its course, on the grass, for a distance of half a verst, and climbed down the banks where they were steepest, among thorny bushes, being careful to avoid leaving any trace of their passage. The major was so weary, that, to bring him down to the stream, they had to hold him up with belts. His feet were bleeding; they decided to give him back his boots so that he might be able to finish what remained of the journey.

When they reached the first village, Kaskambo, still more ill with vexation than with fatigue, seemed to his guards so weak and exhausted, that they feared for his life, and treated him more humanely. They allowed him a short rest, and gave him a horse for the march; but to turn aside the Russians from the search they might prosecute, and to make it impossible for the

[1] A familiar proverb of Russian soldiers in the moment of danger.

prisoner himself to apprise his friends of the place where he was hidden, they carried him from village to village, and from one valley to another, taking the precaution of blindfolding him several times. They thus passed a large river, which he supposed to be the Sudja. They took great care of him during these journeys, allowing him sufficient food and such rest as he needed. But, when they had reached the distant village where he was to be kept definitely, the Tchetchens suddenly changed their conduct towards him, and subjected him to all kinds of ill treatment. They fettered his hands and feet, and put round his neck a chain, to the end of which a log of oak was fastened. The denshchik was less harshly treated, his fetters were lighter, and permitted of his rendering some services to his master.

Situated thus, at every fresh outrage he endured, a man who spoke Russian would come to see him and advise him to write to his friends to obtain his ransom, which had been fixed at ten thousand roubles. The unhappy prisoner was unable to pay such a large sum, and had no hope except in the protection of the government, which had redeemed, some years before, a colonel who had fallen like himself into the hands of the brigands. The interpreter promised to provide him with paper and to see that his letter reached its destination; but after obtaining his consent he did not reappear for several days, and during this time the major was made to suffer increased miseries. They deprived him of food, they took away from him the mat on which he had lain, and the pad of a Cossack saddle which had served him for a pillow; and, when at last the mediator returned, he announced, in confidence, that if the sum demanded was refused at the line, or if payment of it was delayed, the Tchetchens had decided to make away with him, in order to spare themselves the expense and anxiety which he caused them. The object of their cruel behaviour was to compel him to write more urgently. At last he

was supplied with paper and a reed cut in the Tartar fashion; they took off the chains which bound his hands and neck, so that he might write freely; and when the letter was written it was translated to the chiefs, who undertook to see that it reached the commandant of the line.

From that time, he was treated less harshly, and was burdened with but a single chain, which bound his right hand and foot.

His host, or rather his gaoler, was an old man of sixty, of enormous stature, and with a savage appearance which his character did not belie. Two of his sons had been killed in an encounter with the Russians, which was the reason of his having been chosen, out of all the inhabitants of the village, to be the prisoner's keeper.

The family of this man, whose name was Ibrahim, consisted of the widow of one of his sons, aged thirty-five, and a young child of seven or eight, called Mamet. The mother was as ill-natured as the old keeper, and more capricious. Kaskambo had much to suffer, but the caresses and friendship of little Mamet were in the time that followed a diversion, and even a real consolation in his misfortunes. This child conceived for him so great an affection, that the threats and ill treatment of his grandfather could not prevent him from coming and playing with the prisoner whenever he found an opportunity. He had given to the latter the name of "Kunakh," which in the language of that country means a guest or a friend. He secretly shared with him what fruit he could obtain, and, during the forced abstinence which the major had been compelled to endure, little Mamet, touched with pity, skilfully took advantage of his relations' momentary absence to bring him bread or potatoes cooked in the ashes.

Some months had elapsed since the sending of the letter, without any noteworthy event. During this interval, Ivan had been able to win the good will of

the woman and the old man, or at least had succeeded in making himself necessary to them. He was versed in all the arts that can be employed in a commanding officer's mess. He made "kisliya shchi"[1] to perfection, prepared pickled cucumbers, and had accustomed his hosts to the little comforts which he had introduced into their housekeeping.

To win greater confidence, he had placed himself with them on the footing of a buffoon, every day inventing some new jest to amuse them; Ibrahim especially loved to see him dance the Cossack dance. When any one of the villagers came to visit them, Ivan's fetters were removed, and he was made to dance; which he always did with a good grace, each time adding some new absurd gambol. By behaving thus continually he had obtained for himself the freedom of the village, through which he was generally followed by a crowd of children attracted by his buffooneries; and, as he understood the Tartar language, he had soon learnt that of the country, which is a closely related dialect.

The major himself was often forced to sing Russian songs with his denshchik, and to play his guitar to amuse this fierce company. At first they had taken off the chains which fettered his right hand when this service was exacted from him; but, the woman having noticed that he would sometimes play, in spite of his fetters, for his own amusement, this favour was no longer allowed him, and the unfortunate musician more than once repented that he had let his talent become known. He did not know then that his guitar would one day assist him to regain his liberty.

To attain that longed-for liberty, the two prisoners formed a thousand plans, all very difficult to execute. At the time of their arrival in the village, the inhabitants used to send each night, by turns, a different man to augment the guard. Imperceptibly this precaution

[1] A Russian drink; it is a kind of beer made with flour.

was relaxed. Often the sentinel did not come: the woman and the child slept in a neighbouring room, and old Ibrahim remained alone with them; but he kept the key of the chains carefully on his person, and woke up at the least sound. From day to day, the prisoner was treated more harshly. As the answer to his letters never came, the Tchetchens often visited his prison to insult him and threaten him with the most cruel treatment. They deprived him of his meals, and he had one day the vexation of seeing little Mamet pitilessly beaten for having brought him a few medlars.

One very remarkable circumstance in the painful position in which Kaskambo was placed, was the confidence which his persecutors had in him, and the respect with which he had inspired them. Whilst these barbarians subjected him to continual outrages, they would often come to consult him and to make him arbiter in their transactions and in their contests with one another. Amongst other disputes of which he was made the judge the following deserves mention on account of its peculiarity.

One of these men had entrusted a Russian note for five roubles to his friend, who was leaving for a neighbouring valley, asking him to deliver it to a certain person. The messenger lost his horse, which died on the way, and came to the conclusion that he had a right to keep the five roubles to repay him for the loss he had sustained. This reasoning, worthy of the Caucasus, was not at all relished by the owner of the money. On the traveller's return, there was a great commotion in the village. These two men had gathered around them all their relations and friends, and the quarrel might have led to bloodshed if the old men of the band, after having vainly tried to pacify them, had not induced them to submit their case to the decision of the prisoner. The whole population of the village tumultuously took their way to him, the sooner to learn the issue of this

farcical trial. Kaskambo was brought out of his prison and led on to the platform which constituted the roof of the house.

The greater number of the dwellings in the Caucasian valleys are partly hollowed out of the earth, and only rise three or four feet above the ground; the roof is horizontal, and is formed of a layer of beaten clay. The inhabitants, especially the women, come to rest on these terraces after sunset, and often pass the night there in the fine season.

When Kaskambo appeared on the roof there was a profound silence. It must doubtless have been extraordinary, to see, at this strange tribunal, furious litigants, armed with pistols and daggers, submitting their cause to a judge in chains, half dead with hunger and distress, who nevertheless passed judgement in the last resort, and whose decisions were always respected.

Despairing of making the accused listen to reason, the major made him come forward, and, in order to put the laughers at least on the side of justice, questioned him as follows. "If, instead of giving you five roubles to take to his creditor, your friend had only asked you to give him his greeting, your horse would be dead all the same, would it not?"

"Perhaps," answered the defendant.

"And in that case," continued the judge, "what would you have done with the greeting? Would you not have been obliged to keep it as payment and to be content with it? My sentence is, therefore, that you return the note, and that your friend gives you his greeting."

When this decision was translated to the spectators, shouts of laughter proclaimed far and wide the wisdom of the new Solomon. The condemned man himself, after arguing for some time, was obliged to yield, and said, as he looked at the note: "I knew beforehand that I should lose if that dog of a Christian interfered." This singular confidence shows the idea entertained by

these people of European superiority, and the innate feeling for justice that exists among the fiercest of men.

Kaskambo had written three letters since his detention without receiving any answer: a year had passed. The wretched prisoner, without linen, and in want of all the comforts of life, found his health declining, and gave way to despair. Ivan himself had been ill for some time. The severe Ibrahim, to the major's great surprise, had however freed the young man from his fetters during his sickness, and still left him at liberty. The major questioning him one day on this matter: "Master," Ivan said to him, "I have been wanting for a long time to consult you about a plan which has come into my head. I think that I should do well to turn Mahometan."

"You are certainly going mad!"

"No, I am not mad: this is the only way in which I can be useful to you. The priest has told me that if I were circumcised they could no longer keep me in chains; then I could do you service, procure you at least good food and linen, and at last, who knows? when I am free... the God of the Russians is great! We shall see..."

"But God Himself will desert you, poor wretch, if you betray Him."

Kaskambo, even while scolding his servant, could hardly refrain from laughing at his whimsical plan, but, when he went so far as to forbid it formally: "Master," Ivan answered, "I can no longer obey you, and it would be useless for me to try to hide it from you; it is already done: I have been a Mahometan since the day when you thought I was ill and they took off my chains. I am called Hussein now. What is the harm? Can I not be a Christian again when I wish and when you are free! See, already! I no longer have chains, I can break yours on the first favourable opportunity, and I have a strong hope that it will present itself."

As a matter of fact, they kept their word to him: he was no longer fettered, and from that time enjoyed greater freedom; but this very freedom was nearly fatal to him. The chief authors of the expedition against Kaskambo soon began to fear that the new Mussulman might desert. His long stay in their midst and his knowledge of their language put him in a position to know them all by name, and to give a description of them to the line if he returned there; which would have exposed them personally to the vengeance of the Russians; they highly disapproved of the priest's misplaced zeal. On the other hand, the good Mussulmans, who had favoured him from the time of his conversion, noticed that, when he was saying his prayer on the roof of the house, according to custom, and as the mullah had expressly enjoined him, that he might gain the public good-will, he often, through habit and inadvertently, mixed up signs of the cross with the prostrations he made towards Mecca, to which it sometimes happened that he turned his back; this made them doubt the reality of his conversion.

A few months after his pretended apostasy he noticed a great change in his intercourse with the inhabitants, and could not mistake the manifest signs of their ill will. He was vainly seeking to discover its cause, when the young men with whom he chiefly associated came to propose that he should accompany them in an expedition which they intended to undertake. Their plan was to cross the Terek, to attack some merchants who would be going to Mozdok; Ivan agreed to their proposal without hesitation. He had long been desiring to procure himself arms; they promised him a share of the spoils. He thought that when they saw him return to his master's side the people who suspected him of wishing to desert would no longer have the same reasons for distrusting him. However, the major having strongly opposed the plan, he seemed to be thinking of it no

longer, when one morning Kaskambo, on awaking, saw the mat on which Ivan slept rolled up against the wall; he had gone during the night. His companions were to pass the Terek on the following night, and attack the merchants, of whose progress they knew from their spies.

The trustfulness of the Tchetchens ought to have aroused some suspicion in Ivan's mind: it was not natural that men so wily and suspicious should admit a Russian, their prisoner, into an expedition directed against his compatriots. In fact it transpired from what followed that they had only asked him to accompany them with the intention of assassinating him. As his character of a new convert compelled them to use some caution, they had planned to keep him in sight during the march, and afterwards to rid themselves of him at the instant of attack, letting it be believed that he had been killed in the fight. Only a few members of the expedition were in the secret; but the event upset their calculations. At the moment when the band had laid their ambush to attack the merchants, they were themselves surprised by a regiment of Cossacks, who charged them so vigorously that they had great difficulty in recrossing the river. Their great peril made them forget the plot against Ivan, who followed them in their retreat.

As their disordered troop crossed the Terek, the waters of which are very rapid, a young Tchetchen's horse broke down in the middle of the river and was immediately carried away by the waves. Ivan, who was following him, urged his horse into the current, at the risk of being carried off himself, and, seizing the young man just when he was disappearing beneath the water, succeeded in bringing him to the opposite shore. The Cossacks, who, favoured by the dawning day, recognized him by his uniform and "furazhka,"[1] aimed at him, shouting: "Deserter! catch the deserter!" His clothes

[1] A Russian word which corresponds to what is called in French "cap."

were riddled with bullets. At last, after fighting desperately and firing all his cartridges, he returned to the village with the glory of having saved the life of one of his companions, and been of service to the whole troop.

If his conduct on this occasion did not win over to him the minds of all, it gained him at least one friend; the young man whom he had saved adopted him for his "kunakh" (a sacred title which the Caucasian mountaineers never violate), and swore to defend him against every one. But this intimacy was not sufficient to shelter him from the hatred of the principal inhabitants. The courage which he had just shown, and his attachment to his master, increased the fears with which he had inspired them. They could no longer regard him as a buffoon incapable of any enterprise, as they had done until then; and, when they considered the abortive expedition in which he had taken part, they wondered how Russian troops had happened to be at the right moment in a spot so far from their usual haunts, and suspected that he had had the means of warning them. Although this conjecture was without any real foundation, they watched him more closely. Old Ibrahim himself, fearing some plot for the escape of his prisoners, no longer allowed them to engage in continued conversation, and the honest denshchik was threatened, sometimes even beaten, when he tried to talk to his master.

In this situation, the two prisoners contrived a means of conversing without arousing their keeper's suspicions. As they were in the habit of singing Russian songs together, the major would take his guitar when he had anything important to communicate to Ivan in Ibrahim's presence, and sing while he questioned him: the latter answered in the same manner, and his master accompanied him with his guitar. As this arrangement was by no means a novelty, nobody ever noticed a trick

which besides they took the precaution to practise only on rare occasions.

More than three months had passed since the unfortunate expedition which has been mentioned, when Ivan fancied that he noticed an unusual disturbance in the village. Some mules loaded with powder had arrived in the plain. The men were cleaning their arms and preparing their cartridges. He soon learnt that a great expedition was on foot. The whole nation was to unite to attack a neighbouring tribe who had put themselves under the protection of the Russians, and had allowed them to build a redoubt on their territory. It was a question of nothing less than exterminating the whole tribe, as well as the Russian battalion which was protecting the building of the fort.

A few days later, Ivan, leaving the hut one morning, found the village deserted. All the men able to bear arms had gone during the night. In the visit which he made to the village to seek news, he obtained fresh proofs of the evil intentions they had against him. The old men avoided talking to him. A little boy told him openly that his father wanted to kill him. Finally, when he was returning very thoughtfully to his master, he saw on the roof of a house a young woman who raised her veil, and, with an appearance of the greatest terror, made signs to him to escape, pointing out the road to Russia; it was the sister of the Tchetchen whom he had saved at the crossing of the Terek.

When he re-entered the house, he found the old man engaged in inspecting Kaskambo's fetters. A new-comer was seated in the room: it was a man whom an intermittent fever had prevented from accompanying his comrades and who had been sent to Ibrahim to augment the prisoners' guard till the inhabitants returned. Ivan noticed this precaution without evincing the least surprise. The absence of the men of the village presented a favourable opportunity for the execution of his plans;

but the more active vigilance of their keeper, and above all the presence of the fever patient, made success very uncertain. However, his death would be inevitable if he awaited the return of the inhabitants; he foresaw that their expedition would be unsuccessful and that their rage would not spare him. No resource remained for him except either to desert his master or to deliver him immediately. The faithful servant would have died a thousand deaths rather than choose the former alternative.

Kaskambo, who was beginning to lose all hope, had fallen for some time into a kind of stupor, and maintained a profound silence. Ivan, more calm and cheerful than usual, surpassed himself in preparing the meal, and while he did it he sang Russian songs, which he interspersed with words of encouragement to his master.

"The time has come," he said, adding to each sentence the meaningless refrain of a popular Russian song, "hey lully, hey lully, the time has come to end our misery or to perish. To-morrow, hey lully, we shall be on the way to a town, a pretty town, hey lully, which I will not name. Courage, master! don't let yourself lose heart. The God of the Russians is great."

Kaskambo, indifferent alike to life and death, not knowing his denshchik's plan, contented himself with answering: "Do what you like, and be silent." Towards evening the fever patient, whom they had entertained bountifully in order to detain him, and who, besides the good meal he had made, had amused himself for the rest of the day with eating "shashlyk,"[1] was seized with such a violent fit of fever, that he left the company and withdrew to his own home. They let him go without much difficulty, Ivan having entirely reassured the old man by his gaiety. The more to remove any kind of suspicion, he retired early to the back of the room and lay down on a bench against the wall, until Ibrahim

[1] Mutton roasted in small pieces at the end of a stick.

should fall asleep; but the latter had resolved to stay awake all night. Instead of lying down on the mat by the fire, as he generally did, he sat down on a log opposite his prisoner, and sent away his daughter-in-law, who withdrew to the next room, where her child was, and shut the door after her.

From the dark corner where he had settled himself, Ivan looked attentively at the scene before him. In the light of the fire which flared up from time to time, an axe glittered in a recess of the wall. The old man, overcome by drowsiness, let his head fall at times on his breast. Ivan saw that the time had come, and stood up. The suspicious gaoler noticed it immediately. "What are you doing there?" he asked sharply. Ivan, instead of replying, drew near the fire, yawning like a man waking from a deep sleep. Ibrahim, who himself felt his eyelids growing heavy, ordered Kaskambo to play the guitar to keep him awake. The latter refused, but Ivan handed him the instrument, at the same time making the sign arranged. "Play, master," he said, "I have something to say to you." Kaskambo tuned the instrument, and, beginning to sing, they commenced the terrible duet which follows.

KASKAMBO.

"Hey lully, hey lully, what have you to say? Be careful. (At each question, and each answer, they sang together verses of the Russian song following:)

"I am anxious, I am sad,
What to do I cannot tell,
Him I wait whom I love well,
Lonely watch I for my lad.
Hey lully, hey lully,
'Tis sad without my dearie."

IVAN.

"See that axe,—don't look at it. Hey lully, hey lully, I'll split this rascal's head.

"Here I sit and spin apart,
Breaks the thread my hand within:
Ah! to-morrow I will spin,
Now I am too sad at heart.
Hey lully, hey lully,
Oh, where can be my dearie?"

KASKAMBO.

"A useless slaughter! hey lully, how could I fly with my fetters?

"As a calf its mother's side,
As a shepherd seeks his flocks,
As a kid, beneath the rocks,
Seeks the grass in sweet spring-tide,
Hey lully, hey lully,
So seek I for my dearie."

IVAN.

"The key of the fetters will be in the brigand's pocket.

"When I hie at break of day,
With my pitcher, to the well,—
How it is I cannot tell!—
Still my feet seek out the way,
Hey lully, hey lully,
That leads me to my dearie."

KASKAMBO.

"The woman will give the alarm, hey lully.

"Waiting, ah! what grief I prove,
He, ingrate, elsewhere is gay,
Maybe false he doth me play,
Happy with another love.
Hey lully, hey lully,
Can I have lost my dearie?"

IVAN.

"It will happen as it may: will you not die all the same, hey lully, of misery and starvation?

"Ah, if false he be indeed,
If he pass me by some day,
Let the village burn away,
And on me the fierce flames feed!
Hey lully, hey lully,
Why live without my dearie?"

The old man becoming attentive, they redoubled the hey lully, accompanied by a noisy arpeggio: "Play, master," continued the denshchik, "play the Cossack dance; I am going to dance round the room so as to get near the axe; play boldly."

KASKAMBO.

"Well, be it so; this hell will be ended."

He turned away his head and began with all his might to play the required dance.

Ivan began the steps and grotesque attitudes of the Cossack dance, which the old man especially liked, leaping and gambolling, and uttering cries to distract his attention. When Kaskambo felt that the dancer was near the axe, his heart throbbed with anxiety: this means of their deliverance was in a little cupboard without a door, contrived within the wall, but at a height to which Ivan could hardly reach. To have it within his reach, he took advantage of a favourable moment, seized it suddenly and at once placed it on the ground in the shadow cast by Ibrahim's body. When the latter looked at him, he was far from the place, and continuing his dance. This dangerous scene had lasted for some time, and Kaskambo, weary of playing, began to think that his denshchik's courage was failing, or that he did not think it a favourable opportunity. He glanced at him at the instant when, having seized the axe, the intrepid dancer was steadily advancing to strike the brigand with it. The emotion felt by the major was so strong, that he stopped playing, and let his guitar fall on his knees. At the same moment, the old man had stooped, and made a step forward to push some brushwood into the fire: some dry leaves burst into flame, and cast a bright glow into the room. Ibrahim turned round to sit down.

If, at this juncture, Ivan had pursued his enterprise, a hand-to-hand fight would have been inevitable: the

alarm would have been given, which above all it was needful to avoid; but his presence of mind saved him. When he noticed the major's confusion, and saw Ibrahim rise, he placed the axe behind the very log which served as a seat to the latter, and recommenced his dance. "Play, confound it!" he said to his master; "what are you thinking of?" The major, realizing how unwise he had been, began to play again softly. The old gaoler had no suspicion, and sat down again; but he ordered them to finish the music and lie down. Ivan, quietly going and taking the guitar-case, came and placed it on the hearth; but, instead of taking the instrument which his master held out to him, he suddenly snatched the axe from behind Ibrahim, and dealt him such a frightful blow on the head, that the unhappy man did not even utter a sigh, but fell stark dead, his face in the fire; his long grey beard began to blaze; Ivan pulled him out by the feet and covered him with a mat.

They were listening, to find out if the woman had been awakened, when, surprised no doubt at the silence which reigned after so much noise, she opened the door of her room: "What are you doing in here?" she said, advancing towards the prisoners; "how is it that there is a smell of burnt feathers?" The fire had just been scattered and gave hardly any light. Ivan raised the axe to strike her; she had time to turn her head, and received the blow on her breast, uttering a frightful sigh; another blow, swifter than lightning, caught her as she fell, and stretched her dead at Kaskambo's feet. Terrified by this second murder, which he had not expected, the major, seeing Ivan advance towards the child's room, placed himself in the way to stop him. "Where are you going, wretched man?" he said; "would you be so barbarous as to sacrifice the child too, who has shown me such friendship? If you set me free at this price, neither your attachment nor your services shall save you when we reach the line."

"At the line," answered Ivan, "you can do as you like; but here we must make an end."

Kaskambo, collecting all his strength, collared him as he attempted to force his passage. "Wretch," he said, "if you dare to attempt his life, if you touch a single hair of his head, I swear here before God that I will give myself up into the hands of the Tchetchens, and your barbarity will be in vain."

"Into the hands of the Tchetchens!" repeated the denshchik, raising his bloody axe above his master's head; "they shall never recapture you alive; I will slay them, you and myself, before that happens. This child might ruin us by giving the alarm; in your present state, women would be enough to put you back in prison."

"Stop! stop!" cried Kaskambo, from whose hands Ivan was trying to free himself. "Stop! monster, you shall murder me before committing this crime!"

But, impeded by his chains and weak as he was, he could not restrain the ferocious young man, who thrust him back, so that he fell violently to the ground, ready to faint from bewilderment and horror. While, all stained with the blood of the first victims, he was attempting to rise, "Ivan," he cried, "I implore you, do not kill him! In the name of God, do not spill the blood of that innocent creature!"

He ran to the help of the child as soon as he had the strength; but when he reached the door of the room he knocked in the darkness against Ivan coming out.

"All is over, master; let us lose no time, and don't make a noise. Don't make a noise, I tell you," he answered to his master's despairing reproaches: "what's done is done; it is impossible to draw back now. Until we are free, every man I meet is dead, or else he must kill me; and if any one comes in here before our departure, I don't care whether it is a man, a woman, or a child, a friend or an enemy, I lay him there with the others."

He lighted a splinter of larch and began to rummage in the brigand's cartridge-box and pockets; the key of the fetters was not there: he sought for it as vainly in the woman's clothes, in a chest, and wherever he fancied it could be hidden. Whilst he made this search, the major gave himself up without restraint to his grief. Ivan comforted him in his own way. "You would do better," he said, "to weep for the key of the fetters which is lost. Why should you regret this race of brigands, who have tortured you for more than fifteen months? They wanted to put us to death, well! their turn has come before ours. Is it *my* fault? May hell swallow them all!"

However, as the key of the fetters was not to be found, so many slaughters would be in vain if they could not manage to break them. Ivan, with the corner of the axe, succeeded in loosening the ring on the hand, but that which fastened the chain to the feet resisted all his efforts; he was afraid of hurting his master, and dared not use all his strength. On the other hand, the night was advancing, and the danger became urgent; they decided to go. Ivan fastened the chain firmly to the major's belt, so that it impeded him as little as possible, and made no noise. He placed in a wallet a quarter of mutton, the remains of the evening meal, added to it some other provisions, and armed himself with the dead man's pistol and dagger. Kaskambo took possession of his "burka";[1] they went out in silence, and, going round the house to avoid meeting any one, they took the path into the mountains, instead of going towards Mozdok and the ordinary road, easily foreseeing that they would be pursued in that direction. For the rest of the night they tramped along the moun-

[1] A cloak of impervious felt with long hair, rather like bear-skin. The burka, the ordinary cloak of the Cossacks, is only made in their country: with it they brave with impunity the rain and mud of the bivouac.

tains that lay on their right, and when day began to dawn they entered a beech wood which crowned the whole mountain, and sheltered them from the danger of being seen from a distance.

It was in the month of February; the ground, on these heights, and especially in the forest, was still covered with a hard snow which supported the travellers' steps during the night and part of the morning; but towards midday, when it had been softened by the sun, they sank at every instant, which made their progress very slow. Thus they reached laboriously the side of a deep valley which they had to cross, in the depths of which the snow had disappeared; a beaten path followed the windings of the stream, and proclaimed that the place was frequented. On this account, and because of the fatigue which overwhelmed the major, the travellers decided to remain in that spot to wait for the night; they settled down between some isolated rocks which projected from the snow. Ivan cut down some pine-branches to make from them, on the snow, a thick bed, on which the major slept. While he rested, Ivan tried to find out where they were. The valley at the summit of which they were was surrounded by lofty mountains between which no outlet was visible: he saw that it was impossible to avoid the beaten track, and that they must of necessity follow the course of the stream in order to get out of the labyrinth. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and the snow was beginning to harden again, when they descended into the valley. But before beginning their journey they set fire to their shelter, as much to warm themselves as to prepare a little meal of shashlyk, of which they were in great need. A handful of snow was their drink, and a mouthful of brandy finished the feast. They crossed the valley, luckily without seeing any one, and entered the pass where the path and the stream were confined between steep perpendicular mountains. They

walked with all possible speed, knowing well the danger they ran of being met in this narrow passage, out of which they only emerged towards nine o'clock in the morning.

It was then only that the dark pass suddenly opened out, and that they saw, beyond the lower mountains which intersected in front of them, the immense horizon of Russia, like a distant sea. It would be difficult to form an idea of the joy felt by the major at this unexpected sight. "Russia! Russia!" was the only word he could pronounce. The travellers sat down to rest and to enjoy beforehand their approaching freedom. This anticipation of happiness was mingled in the major's mind with the memory of the horrible catastrophe which he had just witnessed, and which his fetters and blood-stained clothes recalled to him vividly. With eyes fixed on the distant goal of his labours, he calculated the difficulties of the journey. The sight of the long and dangerous road which remained for him to travel with fettered feet and legs swollen with fatigue, soon obliterated even the trace of the momentary pleasure which the sight of his native land had given him. To the torments of imagination was added a burning thirst. Ivan went down to the stream which flowed some way off to bring some water to his master; he found there a bridge made of two trees and saw far off a dwelling. It was a kind of chalet, a summer house of the Tchetchens which happened to be empty. In the plight of the fugitives, this isolated house was a precious discovery. Ivan came to tear his master away from his reflections, in order to lead him into the refuge which he had just discovered, and after having settled him there he at once began to look for the store.

The inhabitants of the Caucasus, who, for the most part, are half nomads and often exposed to attacks from their neighbours, always have near their houses caves, in which they hide their provisions and goods. These

stores, formed like narrow wells, are closed with a plank or large stone carefully covered with earth, and are always placed in spots where turf is wanting, for fear the colour of the grass should betray the deposit. In spite of these precautions, the Russian soldiers often discover them; they strike the earth with the ramrods of their guns in the beaten paths which are near dwellings, and the sound indicates the hollows which they seek. Ivan found one under a shed adjoining the house, in which he discovered earthenware pots, some ears of maize, a piece of rock-salt and several household utensils. He ran to fetch water for cooking purposes; the quarter of mutton and some potatoes which he had brought were placed on the fire. While the soup was preparing, Kaskambo roasted the ears of maize: finally, some hazelnuts also found in the store completed the meal. When he had finished, Ivan, with more time and means, succeeded in freeing his master from his chains; and the latter, calmer, and revived by a meal excellent under the circumstances, slept soundly, and it was deep night when he awoke. In spite of this favourable rest, when he wanted to continue his journey, his swollen legs were so stiff that he could not make the least movement without suffering unbearable pain. However, he had to go. Leaning on his servant, he set out mournfully, convinced that he would never reach the longed-for goal. The motion and the heat of walking appeased little by little the pain he was suffering. He walked all night, often stopping, and then immediately recommencing his march. Sometimes also, giving way to discouragement, he threw himself on the ground, and urged Ivan to leave him to his evil fate. His dauntless companion not only encouraged him by his talk and example, but almost used violence to raise and drag him along with him. They found in their journey a difficult and dangerous pass, which they could not avoid. To wait for day

would have caused an irreparable loss of time; they decided to cross it at the risk of being dashed to pieces, but, before allowing his master to enter upon it, Ivan wished to reconnoitre and go over it alone. While he descended, Kaskambo stayed on the brink of the rock in a state of anxiety difficult to describe. The night was dark; he heard beneath his feet the dull murmur of a rapid stream which flowed through the valley; the sound of the stones loosened from the mountain under his companion's tread, and falling into the water, made him aware of the immense depth of the precipice on the edge of which he had stopped. In this moment of anguish, which might perhaps be the last of his life, the memory of his mother returned to his mind; she had tenderly blessed him on his departure from the line; this thought restored his courage. A secret presentiment gave him the hope of seeing her again. "O God!" he cried, "grant that her blessing may not be in vain!" As he was ending this short but fervent prayer, Ivan reappeared. The pass when surveyed was not so difficult as they had thought at first. After climbing down several fathoms between the rocks, it was necessary, in order to reach the practicable side, to walk along a narrow sloping ledge of rock, covered with slippery snow, beneath which was a sheer precipice. Ivan with his axe cut in the snow holes which made the passage easier: they crossed themselves. "Come then," said Kaskambo, "if I perish, at least let it not be for want of courage; it was only illness that took that from me. I will go on now as long as God gives me strength." They emerged successfully from the dangerous pass and continued their journey. The paths began to be more continuous and well-beaten, and they no longer found any snow except in places looking north, and on low-lying ground where it had accumulated. They had the good fortune to meet nobody until daybreak, when the sight of two men appearing in the

distance obliged them to lie down on the ground so that they might not be seen.

When the mountains are left behind in these provinces, woods are no longer to be found; the ground there is absolutely bare, and a single tree would be vainly sought, except on the banks of the large rivers, where still they are very scarce, a most extraordinary thing, considering the fertility of the soil. They had for some time been following the course of the Sudja, which they had to cross to reach Mozdok, seeking a place where the water, less rapid, would offer a safer passage, when they saw a man on horseback coming straight towards them. The country, completely open, offered neither trees nor bushes as a means of hiding. They lay flat down under the bank of the Sudja, on the edge of the water. The traveller passed within a few fathoms of their lair. They intended only to defend themselves if they were attacked. Ivan drew his dagger and gave the pistol to the major. Seeing then that the rider was only a child of twelve or thirteen, he hurled himself suddenly upon him, collared him, and threw him down on the grass. The youth would have resisted, but, seeing the major appear on the river-bank, pistol in hand, he fled at full speed. The horse had no saddle, and a halter passed through its mouth by way of bridle. The two fugitives at once made use of their capture to cross the river. This encounter was very fortunate for them, for they soon saw that it would have been impossible for them to pass it on foot, as they had purposed. Their mount, although burdened with the weight of two men, was almost carried away by the swiftness of the water. However, they arrived safe and sound at the opposite shore, which unfortunately was too steep for the horse to be able to land. They got off to lighten it. As Ivan pulled with all his might to enable it to mount upon the shore, the halter came unfastened and remained in his hands. The animal,

swept away by the current, after many efforts to land, was swallowed up in the river, and drowned.

Deprived of this resource, but from this time less troubled as to the danger of pursuit, they made for a hillock, covered with loose rocks, which they saw in the distance, intending to hide themselves and rest there until night. From their reckoning of the distance they had already travelled, they judged that the dwellings of the peaceful Tchetchens ought not to be very far away; but nothing could be more unsafe than to give themselves up to these men, whose probable treachery might be their undoing.

However, considering the weak state of Kaskambo, it would be very difficult for him to reach the Terek unaided. Their provisions were exhausted: they passed the rest of the day in gloomy silence, not daring to reveal their anxieties to each other. Towards evening, the major saw his denshchik strike his brow with his fist, uttering a deep sigh. Astonished at this sudden despair, which his dauntless companion had in no way evinced until then, he asked him the reason of it.

"Master," said Ivan, "I have done something very wrong!"

"May God forgive us it!" answered Kaskambo, crossing himself.

"Yes," continued Ivan, "I have forgotten to bring away that fine carbine which was in the child's room. What could you expect? It never entered my mind: you were groaning so up there, and making such a noise, that I forgot it. You're laughing, are you? It was the best carbine there was in the whole village. I would have made a present of it to the first man we met, to put him on our side: for I don't know how, in the state I see you are in, we can finish our march."

The weather, which till then had favoured them, changed during the day. The cold Russian wind blew violently, and drove sleet in their faces. They set out

at night-fall, uncertain whether they should try to reach some villages, or to avoid them. But the long stage which remained for them to travel, supposing the latter, became absolutely impossible for them owing to a fresh misfortune which befell them towards the end of the night. As they were crossing a little ravine, over the remains of snow which covered its bottom, the ice broke under their feet, and they were plunged in water up to the knees. Kaskambo's efforts to extricate himself made his garments wetter than ever. Since the time when they set out, the cold had never been so keen; the whole country-side was white with sleet. After walking for a quarter of an hour, seized by the cold, he fell, through weariness and pain, and absolutely refused to go any farther. Seeing the impossibility of reaching the goal of his journey, he considered it a useless barbarity to detain his companion, who could easily escape by himself.

"Listen, Ivan," he said, "God is my witness that I have done all I could up till now to take advantage of the help you have given me, but you see that it can no longer save me, and that my fate is sealed. Go on to the line, my dear Ivan, return to our regiment; I command you. Say to my old friends and to my superior officers that you have left me here to feed the ravens, and that I wish them a better fate. But, before you go, recollect the oath which you made up yonder in the blood of our gaolers. You swore that the Tchetchens should not recapture me alive: keep your word."

So saying, he lay down on the ground, and covered himself completely with his burka.

"There is one resource left," Ivan answered; "it is to seek the dwelling of a Tchetchen and to win over its master with promises. If he betrays us, we shall at least have less with which to reproach ourselves. Try again to drag yourself so far; or else," he added, seeing

that his master kept silence, "I will go alone, and try to win over a Tchetchen; and, if it turns out well, I will return with him to fetch you; if badly, if I perish and do not come back, here, take the pistol."

Kaskambo stretched out a hand from under the burka and took the pistol. Ivan covered him with dry grass and brushwood for fear he should be discovered by any one during his excursion. As he prepared to go, his master called him back. "Ivan," he said, "hear again my last request. If you recross the Terek, and if you see my mother again without me . . ."

"Master," Ivan interrupted, "good-bye for the present. If you perish, neither your mother nor mine will ever see me again."

After an hour's walk, he saw from a small eminence two villages three or four versts distant; that was not what he sought; he wanted to find an isolated house, which he could enter without being seen, to win over its master secretly. The distant smoke of a chimney discovered to him one such as he desired. He at once betook himself thither, and entered without hesitation. The master of the house was sitting on the ground, engaged in patching one of his boots.

"I have come," said Ivan, "to give you the chance of earning two hundred roubles, and to ask a service of you. No doubt you have heard of Major Kaskambo, a prisoner among the mountaineers. Well, I have rescued him; he is here, a step off, ill and in your power. Should you please to give him up again to his enemies, they will praise you no doubt, but, you know well, they will not reward you. If on the contrary you consent to save him, by keeping him in your house for three days only, I will go to Mozdok, and will bring you two hundred roubles in hard cash for his ransom; while, if you dare to stir from your place," (he added, drawing his dagger) "and to give the alarm to have me seized, I will kill you. Your word at once, or you are dead."

Ivan's assured tone convinced the Tchetchen without alarming him. "Young man," he said, calmly putting on his boot, "I also have a dagger in my girdle, and yours does not terrify me. Had you entered my house as a friend, I would never have betrayed a man who had passed my threshold; but now I promise nothing. Sit down there, and say what you will."

Ivan, seeing with whom he had to deal, sheathed his dagger again, sat down, and repeated his proposal.

"What security will you give me," asked the Tchetchen, "for the fulfilment of your promise?"

"I will leave you the major himself," Ivan answered; "do you think I would have suffered for fifteen months, and brought my master to you, to desert him?"

"That is all right, I believe you; but two hundred roubles is not enough: I must have four hundred."

"Why not ask four thousand? it is easy enough; but I, who wish to keep my word, offer you two hundred, because I know where to get them, and not a copeck more. Do you want to make me deceive you?"

"Well, be it so; I agree to two hundred roubles; and you will return alone, and in three days?"

"Yes, alone, and in three days, I give you my word! But have you given me yours? is the major your guest?"

"He is my guest, and you as well, from this moment, you have my word for it."

They shook hands and ran to fetch the major, whom they brought back half dead with cold and hunger.

Instead of going to Mozdok, Ivan, learning that he was nearer to Tchervelianskaya-Stanitsa, where there was a large body of Cossacks, went thither immediately. He had no difficulty in collecting the sum he needed. The good Cossacks, some of whom had been engaged in the unfortunate affair which had cost Kaskambo his liberty, clubbed together with alacrity to complete the ransom. On the day fixed, Ivan set out to go at last and set his master free, but the colonel who commanded the

outpost, fearing some fresh treachery, did not allow him to return alone, and in spite of the agreement made with the Tchetchen he had him accompanied by some Cossacks.

This precaution again was nearly fatal to Kaskambo. From his first distant sight of the Cossack lances, his host thought himself betrayed, and, displaying at once the savage courage of his nation, he led the major, who was still ill, on to the roof of the house, bound him to a post, and placed himself opposite him, carbine in hand: "If you advance," he shouted, when Ivan was within hearing, at the same time aiming at his prisoner, "if you make another step, I will blow out the major's brains, and I have fifty cartridges for my enemies and the traitor who brings them."

"You are not betrayed," cried the denshchik, trembling for his master's life; "they forced me to come back accompanied, but I have brought the two hundred roubles, and have kept my word."

"Let the Cossacks withdraw," added the Tchetchen, "or I will fire."

Kaskambo himself begged the officer to retire. Ivan followed the detachment for some time and returned alone; but the suspicious brigand did not allow him to approach. He made him count out the roubles a hundred paces from the house, on the path, and ordered him to go away.

As soon as he had taken possession of them, he went back to the roof and threw himself down at the major's feet, begging his pardon and imploring him to forget the ill treatment which, he said, he had been forced to make him suffer for his own safety. "I will only remember," Kaskambo answered, "that I have been your guest and that you have kept your word to me; but, before asking my pardon, please begin by unfastening my bonds." Instead of answering him, the Tchetchen, seeing Ivan returning, jumped from the roof and disappeared like lightning.

On the same day, honest Ivan had the pleasure and glory of restoring his master to the bosom of his friends, who had despaired of seeing him again.

The gleaner of this tale, a few months afterwards, at Yegorievski, passing, during the night, before a little house, handsome and very much lighted up, got out of his "kibitka,"[1] and approached a window to enjoy the sight of a very lively ball which was being given on the ground-floor. A young non-commissioned officer was also looking very attentively at what was going on inside the room.

"Who is giving the ball?" the traveller asked him.

"The major, who is being married."

"What is the major's name?"

"His name is Kaskambo."

The traveller, knowing the strange story of that officer, congratulated himself on having yielded to his curiosity, and had pointed out to him the bridegroom, who, beaming with pleasure, forgot in that hour the Tchetchens and their cruelty.

"Show me, pray," he again added, "the brave denshchik who delivered him."

The non-commissioned officer, after hesitating for some time, answered, "It was myself."

Doubly surprised at the encounter, and still more so at finding him so young, the traveller asked him his age. He had not yet completed his twentieth year, and had just received a gratuity, with the rank of a non-commissioned officer, as a reward for his courage and fidelity. This splendid fellow, after having voluntarily shared his master's misfortunes, and restored him to life and liberty, was now rejoicing in his happiness, as he looked at his wedding-festivities through the

[1] The kibitka is a carriage, the body of which, like that of a roughly-built barouche, is fixed directly on two axle-trees, and in winter on two runners forming a sledge; it is the ordinary travelling-carriage in Russia.

window. But as the stranger expressed his surprise that he was not present at the merry-making, taxing his former master with ingratitude on this score, Ivan gave him a black look, and re-entered the house whistling the tune of "Hey lully, hey lully." He appeared soon afterwards in the ball-room, and the inquisitive stranger got into his kibitka again, very thankful to have escaped having his head split open with an axe.

EL VERDUGO

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

MIDNIGHT had just sounded from the belfry of the little town of Menda. At that moment a young French officer, who was leaning over the parapet of a long terrace, which ran along the edge of the gardens of the castle of Menda, seemed to be sunk in meditation more profound than was natural to the carelessness of military life; but it must be said at the same time that hour, place, and night were never more propitious to meditation. The clear sky of Spain spread an azure dome overhead. The sparkling of the stars and the soft light of the moon lit up a delightful valley, which unrolled itself invitingly at his feet. By supporting himself upon an orange-tree in blossom, the major could see, a hundred feet below him, the town of Menda, which seemed to have taken shelter from the north winds at the foot of the rock upon which the castle was built. Turning his head, he could observe the sea, its shining waters framing the prospect in a broad sheet of silver. The castle was lit up. The merry tumult of a ball, the strains of the orchestra, the laughter of some officers and their partners reached his ears, blended with the distant murmur of the waves. The coolness of the night imparted a sort of energy to his body, fatigued by the heat of the day. And, finally, the garden was planted with shrubs so odoriferous and flowers so sweet, that the young man felt as if plunged in a bath of perfumes.

The castle of Menda belonged to a grandee of Spain, who, together with his family, was then in residence. All that evening the elder of his daughters had regarded the officer with an interest characterized by such sadness, that the sentiment of compassion expressed by the Spaniard might well have been the cause of the Frenchman's reverie. Clara was beautiful, and, although she had three brothers and a sister, the Marquis of Leganés's possessions seemed considerable enough to lead Victor Marchand to believe that the young lady would have a rich dowry. But how presume to think that the daughter of an old man, the vainest in all Spain of his nobility, would be bestowed on the son of a Parisian grocer? Moreover, the French were hated. The Marquis having been suspected by General G . . t . . r, who was governor of the province, of organizing a movement in favour of Ferdinand VII, the battalion commanded by Victor Marchand had been stationed in the little town of Menda to overawe the neighbouring districts, which owed allegiance to the Marquis of Leganés. A recent dispatch from Marshal Ney had given reason to apprehend that the English might shortly attempt a landing on the coast, and had pointed out the Marquis as a man who kept in communication with the Cabinet in London. So, in spite of the good reception which the Spaniard had given to Victor Marchand and his soldiers, the young officer was constantly on his guard. As he made his way to the terrace, from which he intended to examine the state of the town and the districts committed to his oversight, he had asked himself how he ought to interpret the friendliness which the Marquis had never ceased to display towards him, and how the tranquillity of the country could be reconciled with his general's disquietude; but for the last minute these thoughts had been driven from the young officer's head by a sense of prudence, and by a very legitimate curiosity. He had just observed a considerable number

of lights in the town. In spite of it being the feast of St. James, he had ordered, only that very morning, that fires were to be put out at the hour prescribed by his regulations. The castle alone had been exempted from this measure. He could see here and there the gleam of the bayonets of his soldiers at their usual posts; but the silence was most solemn, and nothing announced that the Spaniards were overcome by the intoxication of a feast. After trying to discover a reason for this infringement of which the townspeople were guilty, he found their contravention all the more mysterious and incomprehensible that he had left officers in charge of the night police and the rounds. With the impetuosity of youth, he was proceeding to slip through a gap, in order to descend the rocks rapidly, and thus arrive sooner than by the ordinary road at a small post stationed at the entrance to the town on the castle side, when a slight noise arrested him in his course. He thought he heard the gravel of the walk crunch beneath a woman's light footstep. He turned his head and saw nothing, but his eye was arrested by the extraordinary brightness of the ocean. There, all of a sudden, he perceived a sight so ominous that he stood motionless with surprise, and refused to believe his senses. The silvery rays of the moon enabled him to distinguish some sails at a considerable distance. He trembled, and sought to convince himself that this vision was an optical delusion produced by the fantastic tricks of waves and moon. At that moment a hoarse voice uttered the name of the officer, who looked towards the gap, and there saw the head of the soldier whom he had ordered to accompany him to the castle slowly emerge.

"Is that you, commandant?"

"Yes. What is it?" was the whispered response of the young man, whom a sort of presentiment warned to proceed with secrecy.

"Those rascals down there are as restless as worms,

and I hasten, with your leave, to report some little things I have observed."

"Speak," answered Victor Marchand.

"I have just been following a man from the castle, who came this way with a lantern in his hand. A lantern is terribly suspicious! I don't think that there Christian requires to light candles at this time of night.— 'They mean to do for us,' says I to myself, and I set about examining his heels. And so, commandant, I discovered a pretty heap of faggots on a rock two or three steps away."

A terrible cry which all at once resounded from the town interrupted the soldier. A sudden gleam lit up the commandant. The poor grenadier received a bullet in his head and fell. A fire of straw and dry wood blazed up like a conflagration some ten paces from the young man. The instruments and laughter were no longer to be heard in the ball-room. A deathly silence, broken by occasional groans, had suddenly taken the place of the hum and music of the feast. A cannon-shot boomed across the silvery plain of the ocean. A cold sweat ran down the young officer's forehead. He was without his sword. He understood that his soldiers had perished, and that the English were about to land. He saw himself dishonoured if he lived, he saw himself brought before a court-martial; then with his eye he measured the depth of the valley, and was about to dash himself down, when at that moment Clara's hand seized his.

"Flee!" she said. "My brothers are coming behind me to kill you. At the foot of the rock yonder, you will find Juanito's Andalusian. Go!"

She pushed him away; the young man gazed at her in stupefaction for one moment; but, soon obeying the instinct of self-preservation, which never forsakes any man, even the bravest, he dashed into the park in the direction indicated, and ran over rocks which only the

goats had trodden hitherto. He heard Clara calling to her brothers to pursue him; he heard the steps of his assassins; he heard the bullets from several discharges whistle past his ears; but he reached the valley, found the horse, mounted it, and disappeared with the rapidity of lightning.

Some hours later, the young officer arrived at the quarters of General G..t..r, whom he found at dinner with his staff.

"I bring you my head!" exclaimed the major, as he made his appearance, pale and disordered.

He sat down and related the horrible adventure. His recital was received with appalling silence.

"I consider you more to be pitied than blamed," the terrible general at length replied. "You are not answerable for the Spaniards' crime; and provided the marshal does not decide otherwise I acquit you."

These words afforded but very slight consolation to the unfortunate officer.

"When the emperor hears about it!" he exclaimed.

"He'll want to have you shot," said the general, "but we shall see. Now, let us say no more about it," he added sternly, "except to exact a vengeance that will strike salutary terror into this country where they make war like savages."

An hour later, a whole regiment of infantry, a detachment of cavalry and a train of artillery were on the march. The general and Victor marched at the head of the column. The soldiers, aware of the massacre of their comrades, were possessed with a fury without bounds. The distance which separated the town of Menda from the general headquarters was covered with miraculous rapidity. On the line of march, the general found whole villages under arms. Each of these miserable places was surrounded, and its inhabitants decimated.

By some inexplicable fatality, the English ships had remained hove to without advancing; but it was learned

subsequently that these vessels had nothing on board but artillery, and had outsailed the other transports. Thus the town of Menda, deprived of its expected defenders, whom the appearance of the English sails had seemed to promise, was surrounded by the French troops almost without a blow being struck. The inhabitants, seized with terror, offered to surrender at discretion. With that devotion, instances of which have been not uncommon in the Peninsula, the assassins of the French, foreseeing from the notorious cruelty of the general that Menda would perhaps be committed to the flames and the inhabitants put to the sword, proposed to denounce themselves to the general. He accepted their offer, on condition that the inmates of the castle, from the humblest serving-man to the Marquis, should be delivered into his hands. This capitulation having been agreed to, the general promised to show mercy to the rest of the inhabitants, and to prevent his soldiers from pillaging or setting fire to the town. An enormous fine was imposed, and the richest inhabitants gave themselves up as prisoners to guarantee its payment, which had to be effected within twenty-four hours.

The general took all precautions necessary for the safety of his troops, saw to the defence of the district, and refused to billet his soldiers. After seeing them encamped, he went up to the castle, and took it into military occupation. The members of the Leganés family and the domestics were kept carefully under observation, bound, and shut up in the hall where the dance had taken place. From the windows of this apartment the terrace, which commanded the town, could easily be seen. The staff took up its quarters in an adjoining gallery, where the general at once held a council upon the measures to be taken to oppose the disembarkation. After having dispatched an aide-de-camp to Marshal Ney, and ordered batteries to be established on the coast, the general and his staff

proceeded to deal with the prisoners. Two hundred Spaniards whom the inhabitants had surrendered were shot out of hand on the terrace. After this military execution, the general ordered as many gallows to be erected as there were persons in the hall of the castle, and the town executioner to be sent for. Victor Marchand took advantage of the time until dinner to visit the prisoners. He was not long in returning to the general.

"I come," he said with emotion, "to ask you some favours."

"You!" retorted the general in a tone of bitter irony.

"Alas!" Victor responded, "They are sad favours I ask. When the Marquis saw you plant the gallows, he hoped that you would change the punishment to be inflicted on his family, and begs you to cause the nobles to be beheaded."

"Very well!" said the general.

"They ask also to be allowed the consolations of religion, and to be set free from their bonds; they promise not to attempt to escape."

"I agree to that," said the general; "but you are responsible to me for them."

"The old man also offers you all his fortune, if you will pardon his youngest son."

"Indeed!" replied the general. "His estate already belongs to King Joseph." He stopped. A look of contempt wrinkled his brow, and he added: "I'll do more than he desires. I understand the importance of his last request. Well, he shall purchase the eternity of his name, but Spain shall always remember his treachery and its punishment! I grant his fortune and life to whichever of his sons will take the place of the executioner. Go, and say no more about it."

Dinner was served. The officers at table satisfied an appetite which fatigue had sharpened. Only one of them, Victor Marchand, was absent from the feast. After long hesitation, he entered the apartment where

the haughty family of Leganés was languishing, and cast a sorrowful look on the spectacle now presented by the hall, where only the other evening he had seen the heads of the two young women and the three young men whirling round as they were borne along in the waltz: he shuddered as he reflected that in a little they must roll severed by the executioner's sabre. Bound to their gilded chairs, the father and mother, the three sons and the two daughters, remained in a state of complete immobility. Eight servants were standing, their hands bound behind their backs. These fifteen persons looked at one another gravely, and their eyes hardly betrayed the sentiments by which they were animated. On some brows profound resignation and regret at the failure of their enterprise might be read. Some motionless soldiers guarded them, and respected the grief of those cruel enemies. An expression of curiosity animated their visages when Victor made his appearance. He gave the order to unbind the prisoners, and himself proceeded to unfasten the cords which held Clara a prisoner in her chair. She smiled sadly. The officer could not help coming in contact with the young woman's arms, while he admired her black hair and her supple form. She was a true Spaniard: she had the Spanish complexion, the Spanish eyes, with long curved lashes and a pupil blacker than the raven's wing.

"Have you succeeded?" she asked, addressing him with one of those mournful smiles in which there is still some vestige of the young girl.

Victor could not restrain himself from groaning. He looked at the three brothers and Clara one by one. The first, and he was the eldest, was thirty years old. Short, rather badly built, with a proud and disdainful expression, he was not without a certain nobility of manner, and seemed no stranger to that delicacy of sentiment which once rendered Spanish gallantry so celebrated. He was called Juanito. The second, Philip,

was aged about twenty. He resembled Clara. The youngest was eight years old. In Manuel's features, a painter would have found something of that Roman constancy which David has bestowed upon the children in his republican scenes. The old Marquis had a head covered with white hair, which looked as if it had come out of one of Murillo's pictures. At the sight, the young officer shook his head in despair of seeing the general's bargain accepted by any one of those personages; nevertheless he ventured to confide it to Clara. At first the Spaniard shivered, but in an instant she recovered calmness, and went and knelt before her father.

"Oh!" she said to him. "Make Juanito swear that he will obey faithfully the orders which you will give him, and we shall be content."

The Marchioness trembled with expectation; but, when she bent over to her husband and heard Clara's horrible confidence, the mother fainted. Juanito understood all, he sprang up like a caged lion. Victor took upon himself to dismiss the soldiers, after having obtained an assurance of perfect submission from the Marquis. The domestics were led out and delivered to the executioner, who hanged them. When the family were observed by none but Victor, the old father rose.

"Juanito!" he said.

Juanito made no response but an inclination of the head which was equal to a refusal, fell back in his chair, and regarded his parents with a dry and terrible eye. Clara came and sat on his knee, and began gaily: "My dear Juanito," she said, putting her arm round his neck and kissing him on his eyelids, "if you only knew how easy death will be to me if given by you! I shall not have to submit to the hateful touch of an executioner's hands. You will cure me of the ills which awaited me, and — my good Juanito, you did not wish to see me belong to anybody, did you —?"

Her velvety eyes darted a glance of fire upon Victor, as if to rekindle in Juanito's heart his horror of the French.

"Be brave," his brother Philip said, "or else our race, which is almost royal, will be extinguished."

Suddenly Clara rose, the group which had formed about Juanito broke up; and the son, justifiably mutinous, saw erect before him his old father, who exclaimed solemnly: "Juanito, I command you!"

The young man remained motionless, his father fell on his knees. Involuntarily, Clara, Manuel and Philip followed his example. All stretched out their hands to him who should save their family from oblivion, and seemed to repeat these words of their father: "My son, will you prove lacking in Spanish energy and right feeling? Do you wish me to remain long on my knees, and ought you to consider your own life and your own sufferings?... Is this my son, madam?" added the old man, turning to the Marchioness.

"He consents!" exclaimed his mother in despair, observing Juanito move his eyebrows in a fashion of which only she understood the significance.

Mariquita, the second daughter, knelt and clasped her mother in her feeble arms; and, as she wept scalding tears, her little brother Manuel came to scold her. At that moment the almoner of the castle entered; he was at once surrounded by the whole family, they led him to Juanito. Unable to endure the scene any longer, Victor made a sign to Clara, and hastened to go and try a last effort with the general. He found him in good humour, in the middle of the feast, and drinking with his officers, who were beginning to exchange merry remarks.

An hour later, a hundred of the most notable inhabitants of Menda came up to the terrace, according to the general's orders, to be witnesses of the execution of the family of Leganés. A detachment of soldiers

was posted to keep back the Spaniards, who were drawn up beneath the gallows on which the Marquis's domestics had been hanged. The heads of the townsmen almost touched the feet of those martyrs. Thirty paces distant from them, a block rose, and a scimitar gleamed. The executioner was there in case of a refusal on the part of Juanito. Soon, amid the most profound silence, the Spaniards heard the footsteps of several persons, the measured sound of the march of a picket of soldiers, and the slight rattle of their muskets. These different sounds were blended with the merry accents from the officers' mess, as the dance-music of the ball had disguised the preparations for the sanguinary treachery of the other night. All eyes were turned towards the Castle, and they saw the noble family advancing with incredible firmness. Every brow was calm and serene. One man only, pale and in disorder, leaned on the priest, who expended all the consolations of religion on this man, the only one who was to live. The executioner understood, as did every one else, that Juanito had taken his place for a day. The old Marquis and his wife, Clara, Mariquita, and their two brothers, came and knelt a few paces from the fatal spot. Juanito was led by the priest. When he arrived at the block, the executioner, taking him by the sleeve, drew him aside, and gave him, probably, some instructions. The confessor placed the victims in such a position that they could not see the executions. But they were true Spaniards, and held themselves erect and unfaltering.

Clara darted first to her brother. "Juanito," she said to him, "have pity on my want of courage, and begin with me!"

At that moment, the precipitate steps of a man resounded. Victor arrived on the place of this scene. Clara had already knelt down, her white neck invited the scimitar. The officer turned pale, but he found strength to hasten up to her.

"The General grants you your life, if you will marry me," he said to her in an undertone.

The Spaniard darted a look of contempt and pride at the officer. "Go on, Juanito!" she said in deep accents.

Her head rolled at Victor's feet. The Marchioness of Leganés let a convulsive movement escape her when she heard the sound; it was the only sign of her grief.

"Am I right like this, my good Juanito?" was the demand which little Manuel made of his brother.

"Ah, you weep, Mariquita!" said Juanito to his sister.

"Oh, yes!" responded the young girl. "I am thinking of you, my poor Juanito: you will be very unhappy without us!"

Soon the tall figure of the Marquis appeared. He gazed upon the blood of his children, turned towards the hushed and motionless spectators, stretched out his hands towards Juanito, and said in a loud voice: "Spaniards, I give my son his father's blessing! Now *Marquis*, strike without fear, you are without reproach."

But when Juanito saw his mother approach supported by the confessor, he exclaimed: "She nursed me!"

His voice drew a cry of horror from the assemblage. The din of the feast and the merry laughter of the officers were hushed at the terrible clamour. The Marchioness understood that Juanito's courage was exhausted, with one bound, she leaped over the balustrade, to dash her brains out on the rocks below. A cry of admiration arose. Juanito had fallen unconscious.

"General," said a half-drunken officer, "Marchand has just been telling me something of this execution. I bet you did not order it. . . ."

"Do you forget, gentlemen," exclaimed General G . . t . . r, "that, in a month, five hundred French families will be in tears, and that we are in Spain? Do you wish us to leave our bones here?"

After that address there was no one, not even a sub-lieutenant, who dared to empty his glass.

In spite of the respect with which he is everywhere regarded, in spite of the title of *El Verdugo* (The Executioner) which the King of Spain has granted as a title of honour to the Marquis of Leganés, he is consumed by regrets, he lives in retirement and shows himself rarely. Bowed down by the burden of his splendid crime, he seems to be waiting impatiently until the birth of a second son gives him the right to rejoin the shades who accompany him incessantly.

LAURETTE, OR, THE RED SEAL

COUNT ALFRED DE VIGNY

I

OF THE MEETING WHICH BEFELL ME ONE DAY ON THE HIGH ROAD

THE high road through Artois and Flanders is long and dreary. It stretches in a straight line, without trees, without ditches, through flat fields that are always full of yellow mud. In the month of March, 1815, I travelled along this road, and a meeting befell me which I have never forgotten since.

I was alone, on horseback, I was wearing a handsome white cloak, a red uniform, a black helmet, pistols and a big sabre; it had been raining in torrents for the last four days and nights of my journey, and I remember that I was singing "Joconde" at the top of my voice. I was so young!—The King's household, in 1814, had been filled up with children and grandsires; the Emperor seemed to have taken all the men and killed them.

My comrades were in front, on the road, in the train of King Louis XVII.; I saw their white clocks and red uniforms, right away on the northern horizon; Bonaparte's lancers, who were watching and following our retreat step by step, from time to time showed the tricolour pennons of their lances on the opposite sky-line. A lost shoe had delayed my horse; he was young and strong, and I urged him on, so that I might rejoin my squadron; he set off at a rapid trot. I put my hand to

my belt,—it was well enough furnished with gold pieces; I heard the iron scabbard of my sabre ringing against the stirrup, and I felt very proud and perfectly happy.

It was still raining, and I was still singing. However, I soon grew silent, tired of hearing no one but myself, and I no longer heard anything but the rain and the hoofs of my horse, which was floundering in the ruts. The road was unpaved; I was sinking, and was obliged to go at a walk. My top-boots were covered, outside, with a thick crust of mud as yellow as ochre; inside they were filling with rain. I looked at my brand-new gold epaulettes, my joy and comfort; they were roughened by the wet, which distressed me.

My horse lowered his head; I did the same: I began to think, and to wonder, for the first time, where I was going. I knew absolutely nothing about it; but that did not trouble me long: I was certain that, my squadron being there, there was my duty also. Feeling at my heart a deep, unchangeable calm, I gave thanks for it to the indescribable sense of Duty, and I tried to explain it to myself. Seeing at close quarters how unaccustomed fatigues were gaily borne by heads so fair, or so white, how a secure future was so cavalierly risked by so many prosperous men of the world, and taking my share in that miraculous satisfaction which is imparted to every man by the conviction that he cannot evade any debt of Honour, I concluded that an easier and more common thing than people imagine, is SELF-SACRIFICE.

I wondered whether Self-sacrifice was not a feeling innate in us; what was this need of obeying, and resigning our will into another's hands, as if it were a heavy and wearisome load; whence came the secret happiness at being rid of this burden, and why human pride had never rebelled against it. I saw clearly how this mysterious instinct bound peoples together, every-

where, into powerful unions, but nowhere did I see, so entire and so formidable as in Armies, this renunciation of individual actions, words, wishes and almost of thoughts. I saw resistance possible and usual everywhere, the citizen, in all places, practising a discerning and intelligent obedience which examines into matters, and may be suspended. I saw how even the wife's tender submission ends as soon as she is bidden to do wrong, and how the law defends her; but military obedience, passive and active at one and the same time, receiving the order and carrying it out, striking, with eyes shut, like the ancient Destiny! I traced the possible consequences of the soldier's Self-sacrifice, irretrievable, unconditional, and sometimes leading to terrible duties.

Thus I thought as I journeyed on at my horse's pleasure, looking at the time by my watch, and seeing the road still stretching out in a straight line, without a tree or a house, and cutting the plain as far as eye could see, like a broad yellow stripe on a grey canvas. Sometimes the watery stripe blended with the watery earth around it, and, when a rather less pallid light illuminated this desolate stretch of country, I saw myself in the midst of a muddy sea, following a current of slime and plaster.

As I carefully examined this yellow stripe of road, I noticed on it, about a quarter of a league off, a little black moving speck. This gave me pleasure,—it was somebody. I saw that this black speck was going like myself in the direction of Lille, and that it was travelling in a zigzag, a sign of a laborious journey. I accelerated my pace and gained on this object, which lengthened somewhat and grew larger beneath my gaze. I resumed a trot on firmer ground, and thought I made out a kind of small black vehicle. I was hungry, I hoped that it was a canteen-woman's cart, and, regarding my poor horse as a boat, I rowed it with all my might to reach

that fortunate isle, in that sea wherein at times it sank up to the middle.

A hundred paces off, I was able to distinguish clearly a little white wooden cart, covered with three hoops and with black oilcloth. It looked like a little cradle set on two wheels. The wheels were sunk in the mud up to the axle-trees; a little mule which drew them was laboriously led by a man on foot who held the bridle. I drew near and viewed him with attention.

He was a man of about fifty, with a white moustache, tall and strong, with back bent like those old infantry officers who have carried the knapsack. He wore their uniform, and you caught a glimpse of a major's epaulette under a short blue cloak, much worn. His face was rugged, but kind, as so many are in the army. He looked at me sideways under his thick black eyebrows, and briskly drew from his cart a gun, which he cocked, at the same time crossing to the other side of his mule, of which he made a rampart. Having seen his white cockade, I contented myself with showing the sleeve of my red uniform, and he replaced his gun in the cart, saying:

"Ah! that makes a difference, I took you for one of those fellows who are chasing us. Will you have a drink?"

"With pleasure," I said, approaching him, "I have drunk nothing for twenty-four hours."

He had hanging from his neck a cocoa-nut, very finely carved, contrived as a flask, with a silver neck, and he seemed rather proud of it. He passed it to me, and I drank a little poor white wine from it with great enjoyment; I returned the cocoa-nut to him.

"To the health of the King!" he said as he drank; "he made me an officer of the Legion of Honour, it is only fair that I should follow him to the frontier. Indeed, as I have only my epaulette to live by, I shall afterwards resume command of my battalion, it is my duty."

So speaking, as if to himself, he started his little mule once more, saying that we had no time to lose; and, as I was of his opinion, I set off again along with him. I looked at him continually without questioning him, never having cared for the indiscreet chatter so common amongst us.

We went on without speaking for about a quarter of a league. As he stopped then to give a rest to his little mule, which it pained me to see, I stopped too and tried to squeeze from my riding-boots the water which filled them, as if they were two wells in which my legs had been soaked.

"Your boots are beginning to stick to your feet," he said.

"I have not had them off for four nights," I told him.

"Pooh! in a week you won't notice it," he rejoined in his hoarse voice; "it is something to be alone, you know, in times like those we live in. Do you know what I have in there?"

"No," I said.

"A woman."

I said "Oh!" without too much surprise, and marched on calmly, at a walking pace. He followed me.

"That wretched wheelbarrow didn't cost me much," he went on, "nor the mule either; but it is all I need, though this road is a devil of a pull."

I offered him my horse to mount when he felt tired; and as I only talked to him gravely and simply of his turn-out, for which he feared mockery, he suddenly put himself at his ease, and, coming near my stirrup, slapped me on the knee, saying:

"Well, you're a good lad, though you are in the Reds."

From his bitter tone, in thus designating the four Red Companies, I gathered what malignant prejudices had been aroused in the army by the luxury and the commissions of these corps of officers.

"However," he added, "I shall not accept your offer,

seeing that I cannot ride, and that that's not *my* business."

"But, major, superior officers like yourself have to do so."

"Pooh! once a year at the inspection, and then on a hired horse. *I* have always been a sailor, and since then a foot-soldier; I don't understand horsemanship."

He walked twenty paces, looking at me sideways from time to time, as if expecting a question: and as no word was forthcoming he continued:

"You aren't inquisitive, upon my word! What I said just now should have surprised you."

"I am seldom surprised," said I.

"Oh! but if I told you how I left off being a sailor, we should see."

"Well," I replied, "why don't you try? it will warm you, and make me forget that the rain is soaking into my back and only stopping at my heels."

The good major solemnly prepared to speak, with all the pleasure of a child. He adjusted his oilcloth-covered shako on his head, and jerked his shoulder in a way that no one who has not served in the infantry can picture, in the way that a foot-soldier does to lift his knapsack and lighten its weight for a moment; it is a soldier's custom, which, in an officer, becomes a bad habit. After this convulsive gesture, he again drank a little wine from his cocoa-nut, gave the little mule an encouraging kick in the stomach, and began.

II

THE STORY OF THE RED SEAL

You must know first of all, my lad, that I was born at Brest; I began as a soldier's son, earning my half-rations and half-pay from the time I was nine years old, my father being a private in the Guards. But, as I loved the sea, one fine night, while I was on leave at Brest,

I hid in the bottom of the hold of a merchant vessel leaving for the Indies; they only discovered me in mid-ocean, and the captain preferred making me a cabin-boy to throwing me overboard. When the Revolution came, I had made some progress, and in my turn had become captain of a neat enough little merchant vessel, having scoured the sea for fifteen years. When the ex-royal navy, a fine old navy too, by Jove! suddenly found itself without officers, they took some captains from the merchant navy. I had had some skirmishes with buccaneers of which I may tell you later; they put me in command of a brig of war named the "Marat."

On the 28th of Fructidor, 1797, I received orders to set sail for Cayenne. I had to take there sixty soldiers and a man sentenced to transportation, who was left over from the hundred and ninety-three whom the frigate "Decade" had taken on board some days before. I was ordered to treat this individual with consideration, and in the Directory's first letter was enclosed a second, sealed with three red seals, in the midst of which was one very large. I was forbidden to open this letter before reaching the first degree of north latitude, between the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth of longitude, that is to say, when just about to cross the line.

This big letter had a quite peculiar appearance. It was long, and so tightly shut that I could read nothing between the corners or through the envelope. I am not superstitious, but that letter frightened me. I put it in my room under the glass of a wretched little English clock which was nailed over my bed. That bed was a real sailor's bed, you know what they are like. But what am I talking about? You are sixteen at the very most, you can't have seen one.

A queen's room cannot be arranged as neatly as a sailor's, I say it without any wish to boast. Everything has its own little place and its own little nail.

Nothing can move about. The vessel may roll as it pleases, without displacing anything. The furniture is made to suit the shape of the ship and of your own little room. My bed was a chest. When it was open, I slept in it; when it was shut, it was my sofa, and I smoked my pipe on it. Sometimes it was my table; then we sat on two little casks which were in the room. My floor was waxed and scrubbed like mahogany, and shone like a jewel: a real mirror! Oh! it was a pretty little room! And my brig certainly had its value as well. We often enjoyed ourselves famously there, and the voyage began pleasantly enough that time, had it not been . . . But we must not anticipate.

We had a good north-north-west wind, and I was engaged in putting the letter under the glass of my clock, when my "convict" entered my room; he was holding the hand of a pretty young thing of about seventeen. He told me that he was nineteen; a handsome fellow, though rather pale, and too fair-skinned for a man. He was a man all the same; and a man who conducted himself, when occasion arose, better than many old ones would have done, as you will see. He held his little wife by the arm; she was as fresh and gay as a child. They looked like two turtle-doves. To me it was a pleasant sight. I said to them:

"Well, children! you have come to pay the old captain a visit: it is charming of you. I am taking you rather a long way; but so much the better, we shall have time to get to know one another. I am sorry to receive the lady without my coat; but I was going to nail this great rascal of a letter up there. Perhaps you would give me a hand?"

They really were good little things. The little husband took the hammer, and the little wife the nails, and they passed them to me as I asked for them; and she said to me: "Right! left! captain!" laughing because the pitching of the ship made my clock toss

about. I can still hear her even now with her little voice: "Left! right! captain!" She was laughing at me.—"Ah!" I said, "you little mischief! I will make your husband scold you, I will!" Then she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. They really were charming, and that was the way we became acquainted. We were good friends at once.

It was a good crossing too. I always had weather that might have been made for me. As I had never had any but black faces on my ship, I made my two little lovers come to my table every day. It cheered me up. When we had eaten the biscuits and fish, the little wife and her husband kept on looking at each other as if they had never seen each other before. Then I would begin to laugh with all my heart and make fun of them. They laughed too with me. You would have laughed to see us like three lunatics, not knowing what was the matter with us. It was really pleasant to see them loving each other like that! They were happy everywhere; they liked all that was given to them. Yet they were allowanced like all the rest of us; I only added a little Swedish brandy when they dined with me, just a small glass, to keep up my rank. They slept in a hammock, in which the ship rolled them about like those two pears I have there in my wet handkerchief. They were brisk and contented. I was like you, I asked no questions. What need was there for *me*, a ferryman, to know their name and business? I was carrying them from the other side of the sea, as I would have carried two birds of paradise.

At the end of a month, I had got to look on them as my children. All day long, when I called them, they would come to sit with me. The young man wrote at my table, that is to say on my bed; and, when I wished, he helped me to take my "reckoning." He soon knew how to do it as well as I; I was sometimes

quite amazed at it. The young wife would sit on a little cask and begin to sew.

One day that they were settled like this I said to them:

"Do you know, my little friends, that we make a family picture, as we are now? I don't want to question you, but probably you haven't more money than you need, and you are pretty delicate, both of you, to dig and use the pick as the convicts at Cayenne do. It is a wretched country, I can tell you that with all my heart; but I, who am an old wizened tar dried up by the sun, I should live there like a lord. If you had, as it seems to me (without wishing to question you) that you do have, a little liking for me, I should be willing enough to leave my old brig, which is now no better than an old tub, and I would settle there with you, if you like. I have no family but a dog, which is a grief to me; you would be a little company for me. I would help you in many things; and I have got together a good stock of goods honestly enough smuggled, on which we should live, and which I should leave you when I came to turn up my toes, as they say in polite society."

They sat staring at one another quite amazed, looking as if they thought I was not speaking the truth; and the little woman ran, as she always did, and threw her arms round the other's neck, and sat on his knees, quite red in the face, and crying. He hugged her tightly, and I saw tears in his eyes as well; he held out his hand to me, and turned paler than usual. She whispered to him, and her long fair locks fell over his shoulder; her hair had come untwisted like a rope suddenly uncoiled, for she was as lively as a fish: that hair, if only you could have seen it! it was like gold. As they kept on whispering, the young man kissing her brow from time to time, and she weeping, I grew impatient:

"Well, would that suit you?" I said to them at last.

"But . . . but, captain, you are very kind," said the

husband, "but the fact is . . . you could not live with convicts, and . . ." He looked down.

"I don't know," I said, "what you have done to get transported, but you'll tell me that some day, or not at all, if you'd prefer. You don't look to me as if your consciences were very heavy, and I'm quite sure that I've done many worse things than you in my life, so there, you poor innocents. Of course while you are in my custody, I shall not release you, you mustn't expect it; I would sooner cut off your heads like two pigeons'. But, the epaulette once laid aside, I no longer know either admiral or anything else."

"The fact is," he answered, sadly shaking his dark head, dark, although powdered a little, as was still the fashion at that time, "the fact is I think it would be dangerous for you, captain, to seem to know us. We laugh because we are young; we look happy because we love each other; but I have some bad moments when I think of the future, and cannot tell what will happen to my poor Laura."

Again he pressed his young wife's head to his bosom:

"That was really what I was bound to say to the captain; would not you have said the same thing, child?"

I took my pipe and got up, because I was beginning to feel my eyes rather moist, and that doesn't suit *me*.

"Come! come!" I said, "things will clear themselves up later on. If the lady objects to tobacco, her withdrawal would oblige."

She got up, her face all flaming and wet with tears, like a child that has been scolded.

"Anyhow," she said to me, looking at my clock, "you are forgetting, you people; what about the letter!"

I felt something which affected me powerfully. I seemed to have a pain in my hair when she said that to me.

"Good Heavens! I had quite forgotten about it," I said. "Ah! upon my word, this is a pretty business!

If we had passed the first degree of north latitude, there would be nothing more for me to do but to throw myself into the water.—Just to make me happy, the child reminds me of that villainous letter!"

I looked quickly at my chart, and, when I saw that we had a week at least still to go, my head was relieved, but my heart, without my knowing why, was not.

"The fact is that the Directory doesn't treat the question of obedience as a joke!" I said. "Come, I am posted up this time again. The time went past so quickly that I had quite forgotten that."

Well, sir, we all three remained with our noses in the air looking at the letter, as if it was going to speak to us. What struck me a good deal was, that the sun, which slipped in through the skylight, was lighting up the glass of the clock, and showed up the big red seal, and the other little ones, like the features of a face in the midst of the fire.

"Wouldn't you say that its eyes were jumping out of its head?" I said to amuse them.

"Oh! my friend," said the young wife, "it looks like spots of blood."

"Pooh! pooh!" said her husband, taking her arm, "you are wrong, Laura; it looks like a circular to announce a wedding. Come and rest, come along; why does the letter trouble you?"

They ran away as if a ghost had followed them, and went up on deck. I remained alone with the big letter, and I remember that as I smoked my pipe I kept looking at it, as if its red eyes held mine fast, sucking them in as a serpent's eyes do. Its great pale face, its third seal, bigger than the eyes, wide open, gaping like the jaws of a wolf . . . all that put me in a bad temper; I took my coat and hung it on the clock, so as not to see any more either the time or the brute of a letter.

I went to finish my pipe on deck. I stayed there till nightfall.

We were then off the Cape Verde Islands. The "Marat" was shooting along, sailing before the wind, at ten knots, without inconveniencing herself. The night was the finest I have seen in my life near the tropic. The moon was rising above the horizon, as large as a sun; the sea cut it in half, and turned quite white like a sheet of snow covered with little diamonds. I looked at this as I smoked, sitting on my seat. The officer of the watch and the sailors said nothing, and like me watched the shadow of the brig on the water. I was pleased at hearing nothing. I like silence and order. I had forbidden any noise and any fire. I caught a glimpse, however, of a little red line almost under my feet. I should have flown into a rage at once; but, as it was coming from my little "convicts," I wanted to make sure of what they were doing before I got angry. I had only the trouble of stooping down, and I could see, through the big skylight, into the little room: and I looked.

The young wife was on her knees, saying her prayers. There was a little lamp that threw its light on her. She was in her nightgown; I could see from above her bare shoulders, her little bare feet, and her long fair hair, all dishevelled. I thought of drawing back, but I said to myself: "Pooh! an old soldier, what does he matter?" And I continued watching.

Her husband was sitting on a little trunk, his head on his hands, watching her as she prayed. She raised her head upwards, as if to heaven, and I saw her big blue eyes wet like those of a Magdalene. While she prayed, he took the ends of her long tresses and kissed them noiselessly. When she had finished, she made the sign of the cross, smiling as if she were entering paradise. I saw that he made the sign of the cross like her, but as if he were ashamed of it. In fact, for a man it is odd.

She stood up, kissed him, and stretched herself out the first in her hammock, into which he lifted her

without a word, as you put a child into a swing. The heat was stifling; she felt herself pleasantly lulled by the motion of the ship, and seemed already to be falling asleep. Her little white feet were crossed and raised to a level with her head, and her whole body wrapped in her long white nightgown. She was a dear, she was!

"My love," she said, half asleep, "are you not sleepy? Do you know it's very late?"

He still remained with his brow on his hands, not answering. This troubled her a little, the good little soul, and she put her pretty head out of the hammock, like a bird's out of its nest, and looked at him with parted lips, not daring to speak again.

At last he said to her:

"Ah! my dear Laura, as we draw nearer to America, I cannot help growing sadder. I don't know why, but it seems to me that the happiest time of our life will have been that of the voyage."

"I think so too," she said; "I should like never to get there."

He looked at her, clasping his hands with a rapture which you cannot imagine.

"And yet, my angel, you always weep as you pray to God," he said; "that grieves me very much, for I know well of what people you are thinking, and I believe that you regret what you have done."

"I, regret it!" she said, looking very hurt; "I, regret having followed you, my beloved! Do you think that, because I have belonged to you such a little while, I love you the less? Is one not a woman, does not one know one's duty, at seventeen? Did not my mother and sisters say that it was my duty to follow you to Guiana? Did they not say that in that I was doing nothing surprising? I am only surprised that it should have touched you, my love; it is all natural. And now I don't know how you can think that I regret anything,

when I am with you to help you to live, or to die with you if you die!"

She said all that in a voice so soft that you would have thought it was music. I was quite touched by it, and said:

"You're a good little woman, you are!"

The young man began to sigh and tap the floor with his foot, as he kissed a pretty hand and bare arm that she held out to him.

"Oh! Laurette, my Laurette!" he said, "when I think that, if we had delayed our marriage for four days, I should have been arrested alone and should have departed alone, I cannot forgive myself."

Then the little beauty stretched out of the hammock her pretty white arms, bare to the shoulders, and stroked his brow, his hair, and his eyes, taking his head as if she would carry it away and hide it in her bosom. She smiled like a child, and said to him a lot of little womanly things, the like of which I had never heard before. She closed his mouth with her fingers so that only she could speak. She said, playfully taking her long hair like a handkerchief to wipe his eyes:

"Tell me, is it not much better to have with you a woman who loves you, my beloved? I am quite pleased, myself, to go to Cayenne; I shall see savages and cocoa-palms like Paul and Virginia's, shan't I? We shall each plant our own. We shall see which will be the better gardener. We'll make a little hut for us two. I will work all day and all night, if you like. I am strong; see, look at my arms;—see, I could almost lift you. Don't laugh at me; I can embroider very well, besides; and is there not a town somewhere thereabouts where they need embroiderers? I will give lessons in drawing and music if they want them too; and, if they can read there, *you* will write."

I remember that the poor fellow was in such despair that he gave a great cry when she said that.

"Write!"—he exclaimed,—"write!"

And he grasped the wrist of his right hand with his left.

"Oh! write! why did I ever learn to write? Write! why it's a madman's trade!...—I believed in their liberty of the press!—Where did I get my brains! Eh! and for what? to print five or six poor commonplace ideas, only read by those who like them, thrown in the fire by those who hate them, of no use but to cause us to be persecuted! It doesn't matter for me; but you, lovely angel, become a woman scarcely four days ago! Explain to me, I beg of you, how it was I allowed you to be so good as to follow me here? Do you know at all where you are, poor little one? And do you know where you are going? Soon, child, you will be sixteen hundred leagues from your mother and sisters... and for me! all that for me!"

She hid her head for a moment in the hammock; and I from above saw that she was crying; but he below did not see her face; and, when she withdrew it from the sheet, it was with a smile to make him cheerful.

"It's true, we're not rich just now," she said, and burst out laughing; "see, look at my purse, I have no more than one single louis left. What have you?"

He began to laugh too like a child:

"On my word, I had a crown left, but I gave it to the little boy who carried your box."

"Oh, pooh! what does that matter"! she said snapping her little white fingers like castanets; "one is never gayer than when one has nothing; and haven't I in reserve the two diamond rings that my mother gave me? those are good anywhere, and for anything, aren't they? When you wish, we will sell them. Besides, I think that the dear good captain hasn't told us all his kind intentions towards us, and that he knows quite well what is in the letter. It is surely a recommendation for us to the governor of Cayenne."

"Perhaps," he said; "who knows?"

"Isn't it?" his little wife went on; "you are so good, that I'm sure that the government has exiled you for a little time, but isn't angry with you."

She had said that so well! calling me the dear good captain, that I was quite moved and softened by it; and I even rejoiced in my heart, that she had perhaps guessed rightly about the sealed letter. They began again to kiss one another; I stamped sharply on the deck to make them stop.

I shouted to them:

"Hi! come now, my little friends! the order has been given that all lights on this vessel are to be put out. Blow out your light, if you please."

They blew out the lamp, and I heard them laugh and chatter in whispers in the dark like school-children. I began again to walk up and down alone on my deck, smoking my pipe. All the stars of the tropics were at their posts, as big as little moons. I looked at them, and breathed in air which felt fresh and pleasant.

I said to myself that the good little things had certainly guessed the truth, and I was quite cheered up by this. It was indeed to be wagered that one of the five Directors had changed his mind and recommended them to me; I didn't very well explain to myself why, for there are affairs of state that I for my part have never understood; but, in short, I believed it, and, without knowing why, I was satisfied.

I went down to my room, and went to look at the letter under my old uniform coat. It had a different face: it seemed to me to laugh, and its seals looked rose-coloured. I no longer doubted its good nature, and made it a little signal of friendship.

In spite of that, I put my coat back on the top of it; it worried me. We never thought of looking at it at all for some days, and we were cheerful; but, when we approached the first degree of latitude, we began to stop talking.

One fine morning, I woke rather surprised at feeling no motion in the ship. To tell the truth, I always sleep with one eye open, as they say, and, as I missed the rolling, I opened them both. We had fallen on a dead calm, and it was below the first degree of north latitude, at the 27th of longitude. I put my nose above deck: the sea was as smooth as a bowl of oil; all the spread sails were fallen, clinging to the masts like empty balloons. I said at once: "Come, I shall have time to read you!" looking sideways in the direction of the letter. I waited till evening, at sunset. However, it had to be done: I opened the clock, and hastily pulled out the sealed order.—Well, my dear fellow, I held it in my hands for a quarter of an hour, without being able to read it. At last I said to myself: "This is too much!" and I broke the three seals with my thumb; and, as for the big red seal, I ground it into dust.

After I had read I rubbed my eyes, thinking I had made a mistake.

I re-read the whole letter; I re-read it again; I began once more taking the last line and going back to the first. I didn't believe it. My legs were shaking under me a little, I sat down; I had a sort of quivering on the skin of my face; I rubbed my cheeks a little with rum, I put some in the hollow of my hands, I pitied myself for being so foolish; but it only lasted a moment; I went up to get some air.

Laurette was so pretty that day, that I didn't wish to go near her: she had a little white frock, quite plain, her arms bare to the neck, and her long hair loose as she always wore it. She was amusing herself with dipping her other dress into the sea at the end of a string, and laughed as she tried to catch the sea-wrack, a plant that looks like bunches of grapes, and floats on the water in the tropics.

"Do come and see the grapes! come quickly!" she was crying; and her lover leaned on her and bent down,

and did not look at the water, for he was looking at her very tenderly.

I signed to the young man to come and speak to me on the quarter-deck. She turned round. I don't know what I looked like, but she let her string fall; she seized him violently by the arm, and said:

"Oh! don't go, he is quite pale."

That might well be; there was something to be pale about. Nevertheless he came to me on the quarter-deck; she looked at us, leaning against the mainmast. For a long time we walked up and down without saying anything. I was smoking a cigar which seemed to me bitter, and I spat it into the water. His eye followed me; I took his arm; I was choking, truly, on my word of honour! I was choking.

"Let us see!" I said to him at last, "tell me now, my little friend, tell me a little of your history. What the devil have you done to those dogs of lawyers who are there like five bits of a king? It seems that they are mightily angry with you! It's strange!"

He shrugged his shoulders, inclining his head (with such a gentle look, poor fellow!), and said:

"On my soul! captain, nothing much, after all: three verses of a ballad on the Directory, that's all."

"Impossible!" I said.

"On my soul, yes! The verses weren't even very good. I was arrested on the 15th of Fructidor and taken to La Force, tried on the 16th, and condemned to death at first, then to transportation as a favour."

"Strange!" I said. "The Directors are very touchy fellows: for that letter you know of orders me to shoot you."

He did not answer, and smiled, keeping his countenance pretty well for a young man of nineteen. He only looked at his wife, and wiped his brow, from which drops of sweat were falling. I had as much at least on my face, and drops of another kind in my eyes.

I went on:

"It appears that those citizens didn't want to do for you on land, they thought that here it wouldn't be noticed so much. But it's very distressing for me; for it's no use your being a good fellow, I cannot get out of it; the sentence of death is there in due form, and the warrant for execution signed, paraphed, and sealed; nothing is wanting."

He bowed to me very politely, reddening.

"I ask nothing, captain," he said in a voice as gentle as ever; "I should be very sorry to make you fail in your duty. I should only like to speak a little to Laura, and to beg you to protect her in the event of her surviving me, which I don't think likely."

"Oh! as for that, it's all right, my lad," I said to him; "if you have no objection, I will take her to her family on my return to France, and will only leave her when she no longer wishes to see me. But, in my opinion, you can flatter yourself that she won't recover from that blow; poor little woman!"

He took both my hands, and pressed them, saying to me:

"My good captain, you are suffering more than I from what remains for you to do, I know very well; but what can we do? I can count on you to keep for her the little that belongs to me, to protect her, to see that she receives whatever her old mother may leave her, can I not? to defend her life, her honour, can I not? and also to see that her health is always cared for.—Stay," he added in a lower tone, "I must tell you that she is very delicate; often her chest is so much affected that she faints several times in a day; she must always be well wrapped up. In fact you will take the place of her father, her mother, and myself as much as possible, is that not so? If she could keep the rings that her mother gave her, I should be very glad. But, if it is needful to sell them for her, it must certainly be done. My poor Laurette! see how beautiful she is!"

As things were beginning to get too affecting, I was worried, and began to frown; I had spoken to him cheerfully to prevent myself growing weak; but I was no longer anxious about that: "Come, enough!" I said to him, "honest folk understand each other well enough. Go and speak to her, and let us make haste."

I pressed his hand in a friendly way, and, as he did not let mine go and kept looking at me in a peculiar manner: "Let me see!" I added, "if I have any advice to give you, it is not to speak to her of this. We will arrange the matter without her expecting it, or you either, so be at ease; that's my affair!"

"Ah! that makes a difference," he said, "I didn't know ... that will be better certainly. Besides, the good-byes! the good-byes! they weaken one."

"Yes, yes," I said, "don't be a child, it's better so. Don't kiss her, my friend, don't kiss her, if you can manage it, or you are lost."

I gave him my hand again, and let him go. Oh! it was very hard for me, all that.

It seemed to me, upon my word, that he kept the secret well; for they walked up and down, arm in arm, for a quarter of an hour, and they came back to the ship's side to get the string and the dress, which one of my cabin-boys had fished up.

Night fell suddenly. It was the moment I had decided to seize. But that moment has lasted for me up to this very day, and I shall drag it after me all my life like a chain and ball.

Here the old major was obliged to stop. I took care not to speak, for fear of diverting his thoughts; he continued, beating his breast:

That moment, I tell you, I cannot yet understand. I felt my rage mounting to my very hair, and, at the same time, something or other made me obey and

urged me onward. I called the officers and said to one of them:

"Come, launch a boat... since we are now executioners! You will put that woman in it, and will take her out into the ocean until you hear guns going off. Then you will return." To obey a scrap of paper! for that was really all it was! There must have been something in the air that urged me on. I caught a glimpse in the distance of the young man.... oh! it was terrible to see!... kneeling before his Laurette and kissing her knees and her feet. Do you not think I was very unhappy?

I called out like a madman! "Separate them... we are all rascals! Separate them... The poor Republic is a dead body! The Directors, the Directory, are its vermin! I shall leave the sea! I'm not afraid of all your lawyers; let them be told what I say, what does it matter to me?" Ah! much I cared for them, indeed! I should have liked to get hold of them, I should have had all five of them shot, the rascals! Oh! I would have done it; I cared as much for life as for the rain falling yonder, there.... Much I cared for it!... a life like mine.... Ah! yes, indeed, a poor life... truly!"...

And the major's voice died away little by little and became as uncertain as his words; and he walked on, biting his lips and frowning in a wild and fierce abstraction. He gave little convulsive movements, and struck his mule with his scabbard, as if he wanted to kill it. What astonished me, was to see the yellow skin of his face turn a dark red. He unfastened and violently tore open his coat at his chest, baring it to the wind and rain. Thus we continued our march in deep silence. I saw clearly that he would not speak any more of his own accord, and that I must bring myself to question him.

"I quite understand," I said, as if he had finished

his story, "that, after so cruel an experience, one conceives a horror for one's calling."

"Oh! calling; are you mad?" he said sharply, "it isn't the calling! Never will the captain of a vessel be forced to turn executioner, unless when there come governments of murderers and thieves, who take advantage of a poor man's habit of obeying blindly, obeying always, obeying like a wretched machine, in spite of his heart."

At the same time he drew from his pocket a red handkerchief, into which he began to cry like a child. I stopped a minute as if to arrange my stirrup, and, staying behind the cart, I walked after it for some time, feeling that he would be humiliated if I saw too plainly his copious tears.

I had guessed rightly, for after about a quarter of an hour he also came behind his poor conveyance, and asked me if I had any razors in my portmanteau; to which I merely answered that, not yet having any beard, they were of no use to me. But he did not mind, it was so that he could speak of something else. I noticed with pleasure, however that he was coming back to his story, for he said to me suddenly:

"You've never seen any ships in your life, have you?"

"I have only seen them," I said, "at the Panorama in Paris, and I have not much confidence in the naval knowledge I gathered there."

"You don't know, then, what the cat-head is?"

"I can't imagine," I said.

"It is a kind of terrace of beams projecting from the bows of the ship, and from which they throw the anchor into the sea. When a man is shot, he is generally placed there," he added in a lower voice.

"Ah! I understand, because from there he falls into the sea."

He did not answer, and began to describe all the kinds of boat that a brig can carry, and their place in

the vessel; and then, without any order in his ideas, he continued his story with that affected air of carelessness which always results from long service, because a man must show his inferiors his contempt of danger, contempt of men, contempt of life, contempt of death, and contempt of himself; and all this nearly always hides, under a hard exterior, a profound sensibility.—The hardness of the man of war is like an iron mask over a noble face, like a stone dungeon that shuts in a royal prisoner.

"These craft hold six men," he went on. "They jumped in and took Laura with them, before she had time to cry out or speak. Oh! that's a thing for which no honest man can console himself when he is the cause of it. It is no use saying so, such a thing cannot be forgotten!... Ah! what weather it is!—What devil urged me to talk about this! When I'm telling it, I never can stop, it has to be finished. It's a story that intoxicates me like Jurançon wine.—Ah! what weather it is!—My cloak is wet through!

"I was still telling you, I think, about that little Laurette!—Poor woman!—What clumsy people there are in the world! The officer was so stupid as to take the boat ahead of the brig. After that, it is true to say that one cannot foresee everything. I was counting on the night to hide the deed, and didn't think of the light from twelve guns being fired at once. And, on my life! from the boat she saw her husband fall into the sea, shot dead.

"If there is a God up yonder, he knows how that happened that I'm going to tell you; *I* don't know, but it was seen and heard as I see and hear you. At the instant when they fired, she put her hand to her head as if a bullet had struck her brow, and sat still in the boat without fainting, without crying out, without speaking, and came back to the brig when and how they wished. I went to her and talked to her for a long time as well

as I could. She seemed to be listening to me and looked me in the face, rubbing her brow. She did not understand, and her brow was red and her face quite pale. She was trembling in every limb as if she was afraid of everybody. That has remained with her. She is still the same, poor little thing! an idiot, or as it were imbecile, or mad, whatever you please. Never has any one got a word out of her, except when she asks for some one to take away what is in her head.

"From that time I became as sad as she, and I felt something within me saying to me: 'Stay with her to the end of your life, and take care of her'; I have done it. When I returned to France, I asked to be transferred with my rank into the land-troops, having taken a hatred of the sea, because into it I had spilled innocent blood. I sought out Laura's family. Her mother was dead. Her sisters, to whom I took her mad, didn't want her, and offered to send her to Charenton. I turned my back on them, and I kept her with me.

"Ah! merciful heavens! if you want to see her, comrade, it rests with you." "Can it be she inside?" I asked. "Certainly! here! wait. Whoa! mule..."

III

HOW I CONTINUED MY JOURNEY

And he stopped his poor mule, which seemed delighted that I had asked the question. At the same time he lifted the oilcloth from his little cart, as if to arrange the straw which almost filled it, and I saw something very sad. I saw two blue eyes, extraordinarily large, admirably shaped, starting from a head pale, thin and long, and overflowing with quite straight fair hair. I saw nothing, in truth, but those two eyes, for the rest was dead. Her brow was red; her hollow white cheeks were bluish at the cheek-bones; she was cowering in the midst of the straw, so much so that you scarcely saw

projecting from it her knees, on which she was playing dominoes all by herself. She looked at us for a minute, trembled a long time, smiled at me a little, and went on playing. It seemed to me that she was labouring to perceive how her right hand would beat her left. "You see, she has been playing that game for a month," the major said to me; "to-morrow, perhaps it will be another game that will last a long time. It's strange, eh?"

At the same time he began to replace on his shako the oilcloth, which the rain had slightly disarranged.

"Poor Laurette!" I said, "you have lost, and for ever, truly!"

I brought my horse near the cart, and held out my hand to her; she gave me hers mechanically, smiling with great sweetness. I noticed with surprise that she wore on her long fingers two diamond rings; I thought that here were her mother's rings still, and wondered how poverty had left them there. I would not have remarked as much to the old commandant for all the world; but, as he followed me with his eyes, and saw mine fixed on Laura's fingers, he said to me with a certain air of pride:

"They are pretty big diamonds, aren't they? They might fetch a price on occasion, but I did not want her to part from them, poor child. When they are touched, she cries, she is never without them. Otherwise, she never complains, and she can sew now and then. I have kept my word to her poor little husband, and, in truth, I don't regret it. I have never left her, and I have said everywhere that she is my mad daughter. People have respected that. In the army everything gets arranged better than they would think at Paris, eh!—She has been through all the Emperor's wars with me, and I have always got her through safe and sound. I have always kept her comfortable. With straw and a little carriage, it's never impossible. Her dress was pretty well cared for, and I, being a major, with good pay, my

Legion of Honour pension, and the monthly napoleon, whose value was double, formerly, I was quite able to keep things going, and she did not embarrass me. On the contrary, the officers of the 7th Light Horse would sometimes laugh at her child's play."

Then he went near, and tapped her on the shoulder, as he would have done to his little mule.

"Well, my girl! come now, say something to the lieutenant there: come, just a nod."

She went on with her dominoes.

"Oh!" he said, "she is a little shy to-day, because it is raining. Yet she never catches cold. These mad people are never ill, it's convenient in that way. At the Beresina and all through the retreat from Moscow, she went bareheaded.—There, my girl, go on playing, come, don't worry about us; there, do as you please, Laurette."

She took the hand that he rested on her shoulder, a great black and wrinkled hand; she lifted it timidly to her lips and kissed it like a poor slave. My heart was wrung by that kiss, and I turned my horse back violently.

"Shall we continue our march, commandant?" I said; "it will be night before we reach Béthune."

The commandant carefully scraped off with the end of his sword the yellow mud that covered his boots; then he got up on the footboard of the cart, and pulled over Laura's head the cloth hood of a little cloak she was wearing. He took off his black silk scarf and put it round his adopted daughter's neck; after which he gave the mule a kick, jerked his shoulder, and said: "Off you go, you're a poor lot!" and we set off again.

The rain was still falling dismally; the grey sky and the grey earth stretched out endlessly; a kind of wan light, a pale wet sun, was sinking behind great mills that were not turning. We relapsed into profound silence.

I was looking at my old commandant; he was walking in great strides, with energy still maintained, while his

mule was exhausted, and even my horse was beginning to hang his head. This worthy man from time to time took off his shako to wipe his bald forehead and his few grey hairs, or his thick eyebrows, or his white moustache, from which the rain was dripping. He did not worry about the effect which his narrative might have had on me. He had not made himself out either better or worse than he was. He had not stooped to show himself to advantage. He was not thinking of himself, and, after a quarter of an hour, he began, in the same manner, a very much longer story about a campaign of Marshal Massena's, where he had formed his company into a square against some cavalry or other. I did not listen to him, although he grew warm in demonstrating to me the superiority of the foot-soldier over the mounted man.

Night fell, we were not going fast. The mud was becoming thicker and deeper. Nothing on the road and nothing at the end. We stopped at the foot of a dead tree, the only tree in our path. He first attended to his mule, as I did to my horse. Then he looked into the cart, as a mother does into her child's cradle. I heard him saying: "Come, my girl, spread this coat over your feet, and try to sleep.—Come, that's right! She hasn't got a drop of rain on her.—Oh! confound it! she has broken my watch that I left round her neck!—Oh! my poor silver watch!—There, it's no matter; try to sleep, child. The fine weather will come soon.—It's strange! she is always feverish; mad people are like that. Look, here's some chocolate for you, child."

He propped the cart against the tree, and we sat down under the wheels, sheltered from the incessant shower, sharing a loaf he had and one I had: a poor supper.

"I am sorry we have nothing but this," he said; "but it's better than horseflesh cooked under the ashes with gunpowder on top, by way of salt, as we used to eat it in Russia. As for the poor little woman, I am bound to give her the best I have. You see that I always

keep her by herself. She cannot bear to be near a man since the affair of the letter. I am old, and she seems to believe that I am her father; in spite of that, she would strangle me if I tried merely to kiss her on the forehead. Education always leaves them something, it seems, for I have never seen her forget to hide herself like a nun.—That's strange, eh?"

As he was talking of her like this, we heard her sigh and say: "Take away the lead! take away the lead!" I got up, he made me sit down again.

"Sit still, sit still," he said to me, "it is nothing. She has always said that, because she always thinks she can feel a bullet in her head. That doesn't prevent her doing whatever she is told, and that with great amiability."

I was silent and listened to him sadly. I began to calculate that from 1797 to 1815, which we had reached, eighteen years had passed thus for this man.—For a long time I stayed beside him in silence, trying to account to myself for such a character and such a fate. Then, for no apparent reason, I gave him a very enthusiastic handshake. He was astonished at it.

"You are a noble man!" I said to him. He answered:

"Eh! why that? Is it because of that poor woman?... You know well, my lad, that it was a duty. I have long learnt to sacrifice self."

And he talked to me about Massena again.

The next day, at dawn, we reached Béthune, an ugly little fortified town, where you would say that the ramparts, contracting their circle, had squeezed the houses one on top of another. Everything there was in confusion; there had just been an alarm. The inhabitants were beginning to draw in the white flags from the windows; and to sew the tricolours together in their houses. The drums were beating the call to arms; the trumpets were sounding "to horse," by order of the Duke of Berry. The long Picardy carts were carrying the Swiss Hundred and their baggage; the cannon of

the Body-guard hastening to the ramparts, the princes' carriages, the squadrons of the Red Companies falling in, were blocking up the town. The sight of the Royal Dragoons and the Musketeers made me forget my old travelling companion. I joined my company, and in the crowd I lost the little cart and its poor occupants. To my great regret, it was for ever that I lost them.

It was the first time in my life that I read the inmost depths of a real soldier's heart. This meeting revealed to me a kind of human nature unknown to me, and which the country knows little and does not treat well; I placed it thenceforward very high in my esteem. I have often since then sought around me some man like that one, capable of that complete and unheeding self-sacrifice. Now, during the fourteen years that I have lived in the army, it is in it alone, and above all in the poor and despised ranks of the infantry, that I have met these men of antique mould, carrying the sentiment of duty to its final consequences, feeling neither remorse for having obeyed nor shame for being poor, simple in customs and in speech, proud of their country's glory and heedless of their own, gladly shutting themselves up in their obscurity, and sharing with the unfortunate the black bread which they pay for with their blood.

I was long ignorant of what had become of this poor major, especially as he had not told me his name and I had not asked it. One day, however, at the coffee-house, in 1825, I think, an old infantry captain of the line to whom I described him, whilst waiting for parade, said to me:

"Oh! by heaven, my dear fellow, I knew him, poor devil! He was a fine man; he was 'put down' by a bullet at Waterloo. He had, indeed, left with the baggage a kind of mad girl whom we took to the hospital at Amiens, as we were on our way to join the army of the Loire, and who died there, raving, three days later."

"I can well believe it," I said to him; "she had lost her foster-father!"

"Oh pooh! *father!* what is that you say?" he rejoined in a tone which he meant to be sly and suggestive.

"I say that the call to arms is being sounded," I replied, going out. And I too exercised self-restraint.

THE VENUS OF ILLE

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Ἴλεως, ἢν δ' ἐγώ, ἔστω ὁ ἀνδριὰς καὶ ἥπιος οὕτως ἀνδρεῖος ὤν.

Lucian, *Philopseudes.*

I WAS descending the last declivity of the Canigou, and, although the sun was already set, I could distinguish in the plain the houses of the little town of Ille, towards which I was making.

"Of course," I said to the Catalan who had served me as guide since the previous evening, "of course you know where M. de Peyrehorade stays?"

"Know where he stays!" he exclaimed; "I know his house as well as my own; and, if it were not so dark, I would show it you. It is the finest in Ille. He has money, he has, M. de Peyrehorade, and he's marrying his son to richer than himself even."

"And is this marriage to be soon?" I asked him.

"Soon! perhaps the fiddles are ordered for the wedding already. To-night, perhaps, to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, for all that I know! It's to be at Puygarrig; for it's Mademoiselle de Puygarrig whom the young gentleman is marrying. It will be grand, that it will!"

I had an introduction from my friend, M. de P., to M. de Peyrehorade. He, I had been informed, was a very learned antiquary, and most exceedingly obliging. He would consider it a pleasure to show me all the ruins for ten leagues around. Now, I was counting on his aid to visit the environs of Ille, which I knew to be rich in

monuments of antiquity and of the Middle Ages. This marriage, of which I now heard for the first time, upset all my plans.

"I am going to be a spoil-sport," I said to myself. But I was expected; seeing that M. de P. had said I was coming, I was bound to present myself.

"I'll bet you, sir," my guide said to me, when we were now in the plain, "I'll bet you a cigar that I guess what you are going to do at M. de Peyrehorade's."

"O!" I said to him, as I handed him a cigar, "that's not very difficult to guess! At this hour of night, after doing six leagues on the Canigou, the great thing is supper."

"Yes, but to-morrow?... Listen, I'll wager you've come to Ille to see the idol. I guessed as much from seeing you take the portraits of the saints at Serrabona."

"The idol! What idol?" The word excited my curiosity.

"What! Did they not tell you at Perpignan, how M. de Peyrehorade had found an idol in the ground?"

"A statue in terra cotta or earthenware, do you mean?"

"No, no, in real copper, enough to make a lot of pennies with. It weighs as much as a church-bell. It was away down in the ground, at the foot of an olive-tree, that we got it."

"Then you were present at the discovery?"

"Yes, sir. M. de Peyrehorade told us a fortnight ago, Jean Coll and me, to root up an old olive-tree that was frosted last year, for it was a very bad one, as you know. Well then, as we were busy, Jean Coll, who was going at it with all his might, gave a blow with his pick, and I hear Boom..., as if he had struck on a bell. 'What's that?' says I. We pick, and we pick, and, look! there appears a black hand, which looked like the hand of a corpse rising out of the ground. I did get a fright. I go off to the master, and I says to

him, 'Corpses, master, under the olive-tree! Must call the parson.' 'What corpses?' says he to me. He comes, and has no sooner seen the hand than he cries out, 'An antique! An antique!' You would have thought he had found a treasure. And there he was, with the pick, with his hands, fussing away and doing as much work as the two of us, with his way of it."

"And after all, what did you find?"

"A great black woman, more than half naked, saving your Honour's presence, all in copper, and M. de Peyrehorade told us that it was an idol of the time of the heathens . . . of the time of Charlemagne, no less!"

"I see what it is. . . . Just a Virgin in bronze from some convent that has been destroyed."

"Just a Virgin! Very much so! . . . I'd easily have recognized it, if it had been just a Virgin. It's an idol, I tell you; that's well seen from her look. She fixes you with her great, white eyes. . . . You'd think she was staring at you. You have to cast down your eyes, you have, if you look at her."

"White eyes, do you say? No doubt they are inlaid on the bronze. Perhaps it will be some Roman statue."

"Roman! that's it. M. de Peyrehorade said that she's a Roman. Ah! I can see you're a scholar like himself."

"Is she complete, in good preservation?"

"Yes, sir. She wants nothing. She's even finer and better finished than the bust of Louis-Philippe at the Town-house in painted plaster. But, for all that, I don't like the idol's face. She looks wicked . . . and she is wicked."

"Wicked! What wickedness has she done to you?"

"Not to me exactly; but you'll see. We were breaking our backs to make her stand upright, even M. de Peyrehorade, who was also pulling at the rope, though he has not much more strength than a chicken, honest man! After a good deal of trouble we get her straight.

I was picking up a piece of tile to prop her, when, crash! there she falls in a heap on her back. I shouted, 'Look out below, there!' But not quick enough, though, for Jean Coll had not time to pull away his leg."

"And was he hurt?"

"Broken as clean as a pipe-shank, his poor leg! Zounds, when I saw that, my, I was furious! I wanted to put my pick through the idol, but M. de Peyrehorade prevented me. He gave money to Jean Coll, but for all that he has been in bed a fortnight since it happened to him, and the doctor says that he'll never walk as well with that leg as with the other. It's a pity for him, for he was our best runner and, next to the young gentleman, our trickiest tennis-player. M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade was sorry about it, for it was Coll he used to play with. My word, it was good to see how they returned the balls. Paf! Paf! They never once touched the ground."

Talking thus, we entered Ille, and soon I found myself in presence of M. de Peyrehorade. He was a little old man, still fresh and lively, powdered, red-nosed, with a jovial and roguish air. Before opening M. de P.'s letter, he had installed me in front of a well-spread table, and had presented me to his wife and son as an illustrious archæologist, who was to rescue Roussillon from the oblivion in which it had been left by the indifference of savants.

All the time that I was eating with a good appetite—for nothing makes one so sharp-set as the keen air of the mountains—I was examining my hosts. I have said something about M. de Peyrehorade; I ought to add that he was vivacity itself. He talked, ate, got up, ran to his library, brought me books, showed me prints, filled my glass; he was never two minutes at rest. His wife, a little too stout, like most Catalan women when they are over forty, struck me as a double-dyed provincial, occupied solely with the cares of her household.

Although the supper was enough for six persons at least, she ran to the kitchen, made them kill pigeons and fry *miliasses*, and opened I don't know how many pots of preserves. In an instant the table was crowded with dishes and bottles, and I should assuredly have died of indigestion, if I had even tasted everything that they offered me. Nevertheless, at each dish that I refused, there were fresh excuses. They were afraid I should find myself very uncomfortable at Ille. In the country there are so few resources, and Parisians are so hard to please!

Amid all his parents' comings and goings, M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade budged no more than a gate-post. He was a tall young man of six-and-twenty, with a countenance handsome and regular, but lacking in expression. His build and his athletic proportions quite justified the reputation of an indefatigable tennis-player which he had acquired in the district. He was dressed that evening with elegance, exactly after the plate in the latest number of the *Journal des Modes*. But he seemed to me to be ill at ease in his habiliments; he was as stiff as a poker in his velvet stock, and could only turn all in a piece. His large, sunburnt hands and short nails contrasted singularly with his costume. They were the hands of a labourer sticking out of the cuffs of a dandy. Moreover, though he looked me up and down from head to foot most inquisitively in my quality of a Parisian, he never addressed me the whole evening, except once, to ask me where I had bought my watch-chain.

"Ah, well, my dear guest," M. de Peyrehorade said to me as the supper was drawing to an end, "you belong to me, you are under my roof. I will not let you go, at least not until you have seen everything of interest that we have in our mountains. You must get acquainted with our Roussillon, and do justice to it. You have no idea of all that we are going to show you. Phœnician, Celtic, Roman, Arab, Byzantine

antiquities, I'll show you them all, from the cedar to the hyssop. I'll take you everywhere, and won't spare you a single brick."

A fit of coughing forced him to stop. I took advantage of it to tell him that I should be most sorry to inconvenience him on an occasion so interesting to his family.

If he would have the kindness to give me his valuable advice as to the excursions which I ought to make, I should be able, without his taking the trouble of accompanying me, to . . .

"Ah, you mean the marriage of that boy there!" he shouted, and interrupted me. "Fiddlesticks! that will be over by the day after to-morrow. You'll celebrate the wedding along with us, a family affair, for the bride is in mourning for an aunt, whose heiress she is. So no party, no dance. . . . It's a pity . . . you would have seen our Catalan girls dancing. . . . They are pretty, and perhaps you'd have taken the fancy to imitate my Alphonse. One marriage, they say, leads to another. . . . By Saturday, after the young couple are married, I'll be free, and we'll set out. I must apologize to you for boring you with a country wedding. For a Parisian who is sated with gaieties . . . and a wedding without a dance into the bargain! However, you'll see a bride . . . a bride . . . you'll tell me what you think about her. . . . But you're a sober-sides and don't look at women now. I've better than that to show you. I'll let you see something! . . I am keeping a fine surprise for you to-morrow."

"Faith," I said, "it is not easy to have a treasure in the house without the public knowing all about it. I think I can guess the surprise that you have in store for me. Yes, if it is your statue you mean, the description of it which my guide gave me has served only to excite my curiosity and to dispose me to admiration."

"Ah! He has told you of the idol, for so they call my beautiful Venus Tur. . . . But I won't tell you

anything. To-morrow in daylight you shall see her, and you shall tell me if I am right in thinking her a masterpiece. Upon my word! you could not have arrived more opportunely! There are some inscriptions, which I, poor ignoramus, explain in my own way . . . but a savant from Paris! . . . You will perhaps laugh at my interpretation . . . for I have written a paper. . . . I who am speaking to you . . . an old provincial antiquary, I have come out. . . . I mean to make the press groan. . . . If you will be so kind as read and correct me, I flatter myself. . . . For example, I am very curious to know how you will translate that inscription on the base: CAVE . . . But I won't ask you anything just now! To-morrow, to-morrow! Not a word about the Venus to-day!"

"You are just as well, Peyrehorade," said his wife, "to let your idol alone. Can't you see that you are preventing the gentleman from eating? Go away with you! The gentleman has seen plenty of finer statues than yours at Paris. At the Tuileries there are dozens of them, and in bronze, too."

"There's ignorance for you, the blessed ignorance of the provinces!" broke in M. de Peyrehorade. "To compare an admirable antique to Coustou's vapid faces!

'With great lack of reverence, truly,
Speaks my wife of gods divine!'

"Do you know, my wife wanted me to melt down my statue to make into a bell for our church? Because she would have been the donor. A masterpiece of Myron's, my dear sir!"

"Masterpiece! Masterpiece! A pretty masterpiece she's made, breaking a man's leg!"

"Look here, wife," said M. de Peyrehorade, in a firm tone, stretching out to her his right leg in a stocking of clouded silk, "if my Venus had broken that leg for me, I should not have regretted it."

"Gracious! Peyrehorade, how can you say that? Fortunately the man's getting better. But still I can't bring myself to look at a statue which causes misfortunes like that. Poor Jean Coll!"

"Wounded by Venus, sir," said M. de Peyrehorade with a great laugh, "wounded by Venus, the rascal complains:

'Veneris nec præmia nôris.'

Who hasn't been wounded by Venus?"

M. Alphonse, who understood French better than Latin, winked an eye with a knowing air, and looked at me, as much as to ask, "D'ye understand, Mr. Parisian?"

The supper came to an end. For the last hour I had eaten nothing. I was tired, and I could not manage to hide the frequent yawns which escaped me. Madame de Peyrehorade was the first to notice them, and remarked that it was time to go to bed. Thereupon began fresh apologies for the poor couch I was about to find. I should not be so comfortable as in Paris. Things are so uncomfortable in the provinces. I must excuse Roussillon people. It was in vain that I protested that after a journey in the mountains a truss of straw would be a delicious couch for me; they persisted in entreating me to pardon poor country folk, if they did not treat me so well as they could have desired. At last I went upstairs to the room which was meant for me, accompanied by M. de Peyrehorade. The stair, the upper steps of which were of wood, led to the middle of a corridor, on which several rooms opened.

"To the right," said my host, "are the apartments which I intend for the future Madame Alphonse. Your room is at the end of the opposite corridor. You quite understand," he added with an air which was meant to be sly, "you quite understand that newly married folk must be isolated. You are at one end of the house, they at the other." We entered a well furnished room, where the first object on which I set eyes was a bed seven feet

long, six wide, and so high that one required a stool to hoist oneself into it. My host, having shown me where the bell was, and having satisfied himself that the sugar-bowl was filled and the eau-de-Cologne bottles duly set on the dressing-table, after having asked me several times if I had everything I wanted, wished me good-night and left me to myself.

The windows were shut. Before undressing, I opened one to breathe the fresh night air, so delightful after a long supper. Before me lay the Canigou, which is wonderful to behold at any time, but which, that night, seemed to me the finest mountain in the world, lit up as it was by a resplendent moon. I remained some minutes contemplating the marvellous sky-line, and I was about to close my window when, looking down, I observed the statue on a pedestal some two-score yards from the house. It was placed at the corner of a quick-set hedge, which divided a little garden from a spacious square perfectly smooth, which, as I learned later, was the town tennis-court. This space, the property of M. de Peyrehorade, had been made over by him to the commune, at the pressing solicitations of his son.

At the distance where I was, it was difficult to make out the attitude of the statue; I could only judge of its height, which seemed to be about six feet. At that moment, two rascals from the town were passing by the tennis-court, pretty close to the hedge, whistling the pretty Roussillon air *Montagnes régalades.* They stopped to look at the statue; one of them even apostrophized it aloud. He spoke Catalan; but I had been in Roussillon long enough to be able to understand pretty well what he was saying.

"So you're there, you hussy!" (The Catalan word was more forcible). "You're there!" he said. "So it's you who broke Jean Coll's leg for him! If you belonged to me, I'd break your neck."

"Bah! What would you break it with?" said the

other. "She's made of copper, so hard that Stephen broke his file on it trying to cut into it. It's copper of heathen times; it's harder than I don't know what."

"If I had my cold chisel," (it seems that he was an apprentice locksmith), "I'd soon knock out her big white eyes, as easy as I'd take an almond out of its shell. There's more than two half-crowns' worth of silver in them."

They went a step or two on their way.

"I must wish the idol good-night," said the taller of the apprentices, stopping short.

He stooped down, and no doubt picked up a stone. I saw him straighten out his arm and throw something, and immediately a sonorous blow rang on the bronze. That same instant, the apprentice put his hand to his head and uttered a cry of pain.

"She's thrown it back at me!" he exclaimed.

And my two rascals took to their heels. Evidently the stone had rebounded from the metal and had punished the joker for his outrage on the goddess.

I shut the window, laughing heartily.

"Another Vandal punished by Venus! Would that all the destroyers of our ancient monuments had their heads broken in the same way!"

With this charitable desire, I fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke. At one side of my bed stood M. de Peyrehorade in his dressing-gown; at the other a servant, sent by his wife, a cup of chocolate in his hand.

"Come! get up, Parisian! That's just like you lazy people from the capital!" said my host, while I dressed myself hurriedly. "Eight o'clock, and still in bed! Why, I've been up since six o'clock! This is the third time I've been upstairs; I went to your door on tiptoe; no one, no sign of life. It is bad for you to sleep too much at your age. And my Venus, whom you have not seen yet! Come, quick and take this cup of Barcelona

chocolate. . . . Real smuggled. . . . Chocolate such as you don't have in Paris. Fortify yourself, for, once you are in the presence of my Venus, there will be no tearing you away from her."

In five minutes I was ready, that is to say, half shaved, buttoned awry, and scalded by the chocolate that I had swallowed boiling hot. I went down to the garden, and found myself before an admirable statue.

It really was a Venus of marvellous beauty. The upper part of the body was nude, as the ancients usually represented the greater divinities; the right hand, raised level with the breast, was turned palm inwards, the thumb and first two fingers extended, the others slightly bent. The other hand, approaching her haunch, supported the drapery that covered the lower part of the body. The pose of the statue recalled that of the player at morra, which is designated, for some reason or other, by the name of Germanicus. Perhaps the intention was to represent the goddess as playing at morra.

Be that as it may, nothing more perfect could possibly be seen than the body of that Venus; nothing more suave, more voluptuous than its contours; nothing more elegant and more noble than its drapery. I had expected some work of the Lower Empire; I saw a masterpiece of the best period of sculpture. What struck me above all was the exquisite truth of the forms, so much so that one might have supposed them moulded from nature, if nature produced such perfect models.

The hair, piled above the forehead, seemed to have been gilded at one time. The head, small like that of almost all Greek statues, was slightly inclined forwards. As for the face, I shall never succeed in expressing its strange character, the type of which was not like that of any other antique statue that I can remember. It was not the calm and severe beauty of the Greek sculptors, who, on system, gave all the features a majestic immobility, Here, on the contrary, I observed with

surprise the distinct intention of the artist to render mischievousness almost bordering on malice. All the features were slightly contracted: the eyes a little oblique, the mouth raised at the corners, the nostrils somewhat distended. Disdain, irony, cruelty were to be read on this visage, which was at the same time of an incredible beauty. In fact, the more one looked at that admirable statue, the more one experienced a feeling of pain that such marvellous beauty could be allied to utter absence of sensibility.

"If the model ever existed," I said to M. de Peyrehorade—"and I doubt if Heaven ever produced such a woman—how I pity her lovers! She must have found pleasure in making them die of despair. There is something ferocious in her expression, and yet I have never seen anything so beautiful."

"'Tis Venus' self a stooping o'er her prey!"

exclaimed M. de Peyrehorade, gratified at my enthusiasm.

The expression of infernal irony was augmented, perhaps, by the contrast between her eyes inlaid with silver, very brilliant, and the blackish-green patina which time had given to the whole statue. Those brilliant eyes produced a certain illusion, which recalled reality, life. I remembered what my guide had told me, that she made those who looked at her cast down their eyes. That was almost true, and I could not refrain from a gesture of anger against myself at feeling somewhat ill at ease before this figure of bronze.

"Now that you have admired everything in detail, my dear colleague in the antique," said my host, "let us proceed, if you please, to a scientific discussion. What do you say about this inscription, to which you have not paid any attention as yet?"

He showed me the base of the statue, and there I read these words:

CAVE AMANTEM.

"*Quid dicis, doctissime?*" he asked me, rubbing his hands. "Let us see whether we shall agree on the meaning of this *cave amantem*!"

"Why," I said, "there are two possible meanings. You can translate, 'Beware of him who loves thee; distrust lovers.' But, in this sense I do not know whether *cave amantem* would be good Latinity. Looking to the lady's diabolical expression, I am more inclined to think that the artist meant to warn the beholder against this terrible beauty. So I would translate, 'Beware for thyself, if *she* loves thee.'"

"Humph!" said M. de Peyrehorade. "Yes, that is an admissible rendering: but you will not be offended if I prefer the first translation, which, however, I shall develop. You know who the lover of Venus was, do you not?"

"There are several."

"Yes; but the first is Vulcan. Was the meaning not intended to be 'Despite all thy beauty, thy disdainful air, thou shalt have a blacksmith, an ugly lameter for lover?' A profound moral, sir, for coquettes!"

I could not keep from smiling, the interpretation seemed so far-fetched.

"It's a terrible language, Latin, with its conciseness," I remarked, to avoid contradicting my antiquary explicitly, and I fell back a few paces in order to view the statue better.

"One moment, colleague!" said M. de Peyrehorade, taking me by the arm, "you haven't seen all. There's still another inscription. Get up on the base and look at the right arm." So speaking, he helped me to get up.

I clung on without much ceremony by the neck of the Venus with whom I was beginning to be quite at home. I even looked at her for a moment "under the nose," and found her more wicked and more beautiful than ever at close quarters. Then I saw that there were engraved on the arm some characters in ancient cursive character,

as it seemed to me. With the help of spectacles I spelled out what follows, and meanwhile M. de Peyrehorade repeated each word as I pronounced it, signifying his approval by voice and gesture. Accordingly I read:

VENERI TVRBVL . . .
EVTYCHES MYRO
IMPERIO FECIT

After the word TVRBVL in the first line it seemed to me that there were several letters effaced; but TVRBVL was perfectly legible.

"Which means?" my host asked me, beaming and smiling mischievously, for he was pretty sure that I would not get easily over that TVRBVL.

"There is one word which I can't explain yet," I told him, "but all the rest is easy: Eutyches Myron made this offering to Venus at her command."

"Just so! But TVRBVL, what do you make of that? What is TVRBVL?"

"TVRBVL bothers me considerably. I am hunting in vain for some known epithet of Venus which might help me. Let us see, what do you say to TVRBVLENTA? Venus who troubles, agitates?... You see that I am always possessed by her wicked expression. TVRBVLENTA, that is not at all a bad epithet for Venus," I added in a modest tone, for I was not very well satisfied myself with my explanation.

"Venus the Turbulent! Venus the Rowdy! Ah! Then you believe that my Venus is a tavern Venus, do you? Not at all, sir; she is a well-bred Venus. But I'll explain this TVRBVL . . . to you. Though you must promise not to divulge my discovery before my paper is printed. Because, you see, I am proud of this find.... You might as well leave us poor devils of provincials some ears to glean. You are so rich, you learned gentlemen of Paris!"

From the top of the pedestal, where I was still

perched, I solemnly promised him that I would never be so dishonourable as to rob him of his discovery.

"TVRBVL . . ., sir," said he, coming nearer and lowering his voice, for fear any one besides me might hear him, "read TVRBVLNERAE."

"I am still no wiser."

"Listen! A league from here, at the foot of the mountain, there is a village called Boulternère. That is a corruption of the Latin word TVRBVLNERA. Nothing more common than these inversions. Boulternère, sir, was a Roman town. I always suspected so, but I never had evidence for it. The evidence is here! This Venus was the local deity of the city of Boulternère; and this word Boulternère, of which I have just demonstrated the ancient origin, proves a thing more curious still, namely, that Boulternère, before being a Roman town, was a town of the Phœnicians!"

He paused for a moment to take breath and enjoy my surprise. I managed to repress a strong desire to laugh.

"In fact," he continued, "TVRBVLNERA is pure Phœnician; TVR, pronounce TOOR . . . TOOR and SOOR, the same word, are they not? SUR is the Phœnician name of Tyre; I need not remind you of its meaning. BVL is Baal; Bâl, Bel, Bul, slight difference of pronunciation. As for NERA, that gives me a little trouble. I am inclined to think, failing a Phœnician word, that it comes from the Greek νηρός, moist, marshy. The word would then be a hybrid. To justify νηρός, I'll show you at Boulternère how the streams from the mountains form pestilential marshes there. On the other hand, the termination NERA might have been added much later in honour of Nera Pivesuvia, wife of Tetricus, who may have rendered some benefit to the city of Turbul. But, looking to the marshes, I prefer the derivation from νηρός."

He took a pinch of snuff with a satisfied air.

"But let us leave the Phœnicians and return to the

inscription. I translate, then, 'To Venus of Boulternère Myron dedicates at her command this statue, his work.'"

I took good care not to criticize his etymology; but I wished in my turn to give evidence of penetration, and said to him:

"Stop a moment, sir, Myron consecrated something; but I do not at all see that it was this statue."

"How so?" he exclaimed. "Was not Myron a famous Greek sculptor? His talent must have been perpetuated in his family: it must have been one of his descendants who made this statue. Nothing is more certain."

"But," I replied, "I see a little hole in the arm. In my opinion, it served to fasten something, a bracelet, for instance, which this Myron gave to Venus as an expiatory offering. Myron was an unhappy lover. Venus was angry with him; he appeased her by consecrating a golden bracelet to her. Note that *fecit* is very often used for *consecravit*. They are synonymous terms. I could show you more than one example, if I had Gruter, or even Orellius at hand. It is natural that a lover should see Venus in a dream, that he should imagine that she commands him to give a golden bracelet to her statue. Myron consecrated a bracelet to her.... Then the barbarians, or even some sacrilegious robber . . ."

"Ah, it is easy to see that you have written novels!" exclaimed my host, as he lent me a hand to descend. "No, sir; it is a work of the school of Myron. Only look at the workmanship, and you'll agree."

Having made it an invariable rule never to give a point-blank contradiction to obstinate antiquaries, I bowed my head with an air of conviction and said:

"It is an admirable piece."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed M. de Peyrehorade. "Another piece of vandalism! Some one must have been throwing stones at my statue!"

He had just observed a white mark a little above

the breast of the Venus. I noticed a similar trace on the fingers of the right hand, which, I supposed at the time, the stone had touched in its passage, or perhaps even a fragment had been knocked off it by the shock, and had rebounded on to the hand. I related to my host the insult, of which I had been a witness, and the prompt punishment which had followed it. He laughed heartily at the story, and, comparing the appprentice to Diomede, wished that, like the Greek hero, he might see all his companions turned into white birds.

The breakfast bell interrupted this classical conversation, and, as on the previous evening, I was obliged to eat enough for four. Then M. de Peyrehorade's farmers came; and, while he gave audience to them, his son took me to see a barouche which he had bought at Toulouse for his bride, and which I, of course, admired. Next I went into the stable with him, where he kept me for half an hour boasting about his horses, telling me their pedigrees, and detailing the prizes that they had won at the county races. At last he came to tell me about his future wife, having been led up to her by a grey mare which he intended for her.

"We'll see her to-day," he said. "I don't know whether you'll think her pretty. You are difficult to please at Paris; but every one here and at Perpignan thinks her charming. The beauty of it is that she is very rich. Her aunt at Prades has left her property to her. Oh, I'll be very happy."

I was deeply disgusted to see a young man apparently more impressed by the dowry than by the charms of his future wife.

"You know something about jewels," continued M. Alphonse, "what do you think of this? This is the ring which I'm to give her to-morrow."

With these words he drew from the first joint of his little finger a big ring enriched with diamonds, in the form of two clasped hands; an allusion which struck

me as infinitely poetical. The workmanship was ancient, but I thought that it had been remodelled to set the diamonds. Inside the ring, in Gothic letters, could be read the words, "*Sempr' ab ti*," that is to say, "Ever with thee."

"It is a pretty ring," I said; "but those diamonds that have been added have made it lose something of its character."

"Oh, it is very much prettier like that," he said with a smile. "There are twelve hundred francs worth of diamonds there. It was given to me by my mother. It was a very ancient family ring . . . from the times of chivalry. My grandmother used it for her wedding-ring, and she got it from her grandmother. Goodness knows when it was made."

"The custom at Paris," I told him, "is to give quite a simple ring, usually composed of two different metals, such as gold and platinum. Wait! that other ring, the one on that finger, would be very suitable. This one, with its diamonds and its hands in relief, is so big that one could never put on a glove over it."

"Oh, Madame Alphonse will manage as she likes. I expect she'll be quite glad to have it in any case. Twelve thousand francs is a nice thing to have on one's finger. That little ring there," he added, with a complacent glance at the perfectly plain ring which he wore on his hand, "that ring there was given me by a girl at Paris one Shrove Tuesday. Ah, how I went the pace when I was at Paris two years ago! That's the place to enjoy oneself! . . ." And he heaved a sigh of regret.

We were to dine that day at Puygarrig, with the bride's parents; we got into a barouche and drove to the château, which was about a league and a half distant from Ille. I was presented and received as the friend of the family. I shall say nothing about the dinner or the conversation which ensued, and in which I took little part.

M. Alphonse, placed beside his betrothed, said something in her ear every quarter of an hour. For her part, she did not often raise her eyes, and, when her intended spoke to her, she blushed modestly, but answered him without embarrassment.

Mademoiselle de Puygarrig was eighteen years of age; her supple and delicate figure was a contrast to the large-boned frame of her robust bridegroom. She was not merely beautiful, but entrancing. I admired the perfect naturalness of all her answers; and her air of kindness, which yet was not without a slight tinge of mischief, reminded me involuntarily of my host's Venus. As I made this comparison mentally, I asked myself whether the superiority in point of beauty, which was undoubtedly to be awarded to the statue, was not due, in great part, to its tigress-like expression; for energy, even that of evil passions, always excites us to astonishment and a sort of involuntary admiration.

"What a pity," said I to myself, as we left Puygarrig, "that so amiable a creature should be rich, and her portion should attract the suit of a man so unworthy of her!" On the way back to Ille, being at a loss for something to say to Madame de Peyrehorade, whom I thought it good manners to address occasionally, I exclaimed:

"You are great freethinkers in Roussillon! Why, Madame, you are holding a marriage on a Friday! At Paris we are more superstitious; nobody there would dare to take a wife on such a day."

"For goodness' sake don't talk about that to me!" she said. "If it had depended on me alone, we should certainly have chosen another day. But Peyrehorade would have it, and we had to give in to him. I am anxious about it all the same. What if anything happens? There must be some reason for it, for else why is everybody afraid of Friday?"

"Friday!" cried her husband, "that's Venus's day!

A good day for a marriage! You see, my dear colleague, I can never get away from my Venus. On my honour, it's because of her that I chose Friday! To-morrow, if you like, before the wedding, we'll make a little sacrifice to her; we'll sacrifice two doves, and if I knew where to get some incense..."

"For shame, Peyrehorade!" broke in his wife, scandalized beyond endurance. "Burn incense to an idol! That would be an abomination! Whatever would they say about us in the district?"

"At least," said M. de Peyrehorade, "you will allow me to place a wreath of roses and lilies on her head:

Manibus date lilia plenis.

You see, sir, the Charter is an empty word. We have not liberty of worship!"

The arrangements for the morrow were settled as follows. Everybody was to be dressed and ready at ten o'clock sharp. After chocolate, we were to drive to Puygarrig. The civil marriage was to take place at the mayor's office in the village, and the religious ceremony in the chapel at the château. Next was to come a breakfast. After the breakfast we were to pass the time as best we could until seven o'clock. At seven we were to return to Ille, to M. de Peyrehorade's, where the united families were to sup. The rest followed naturally. As they could not dance, they meant to eat as much as possible.

By eight o'clock I was seated before the Venus, pencil in hand, beginning the head of the statue over again for the twentieth time without being able to catch its expression. M. de Peyrehorade kept coming and going about me, giving me his advice and repeating his Phœnician etymologies; then he disposed some Bengal roses on the pedestal of the statue, and in a tragi-comic voice addressed to it his prayers for the couple who were about to live under his roof. About

nine o'clock he went in to dress, and at the same moment M. Alphonse made his appearance, very tight in a new coat, with white gloves, patent-leather boots, chased studs, a rose in his button-hole.

"You will draw my wife's portrait?" he asked, bending over my sketch. "She is pretty too."

At that moment, on the tennis-court which I have mentioned, a match began, which at once attracted M. Alphonse's attention. I too, tired and in despair of rendering that diabolical face, soon quitted my sketch to watch the players. Among them were some Spanish muleteers who had arrived the night before. They were Aragonese and Navarrese, almost all of marvellous skill. Accordingly the Ille men, though encouraged by the presence and advice of M. Alphonse, were pretty promptly beaten by these new champions. The local spectators were in consternation. M. Alphonse looked at his watch. It was only half-past nine yet. His mother had not got her hair dressed. He hesitated no longer; he took off his coat, asked for a jacket, and challenged the Spaniards. When I saw him do so, I smiled and was rather surprised.

"We must keep up the honour of the country," he said. I found him really handsome then. He was aroused. His dress, which had occupied him so much a little ago, was nothing more to him now. A few minutes before, he had been afraid to turn his head for fear of deranging his neck-tie. Now he had no more thought of his curled hair or his neatly pleated ruffle. And his bride?... Really, had it been necessary, I believe he would have had the marriage postponed. I saw him hastily slip on a pair of sandals, turn up his sleeves, and, with a confident air, place himself at the head of the defeated side, like Cæsar rallying his soldiers at Dyrrachium. I leaped over the hedge and stationed myself comfortably under the shade of a *celtis australis*, so that I had a good view of the two camps.

Contrary to general expectation, M. Alphonse missed the first ball; true it came skimming low down and delivered with surprising force by an Aragonese, who appeared to be the leader of the Spaniards.

He was a man about forty years of age, hard and wiry, about six feet tall, and his olive skin was almost as dark in tone as the bronze of the Venus.

M. Alphonse threw his racket on the ground in a rage.

"It's this confounded ring," he cried, "which pinched my finger, and made me miss a safe ball!"

He took off the diamond ring, not without difficulty; I went to take it from him; but he was too quick for me and ran to the Venus, put the ring on its ring-finger, and resumed his place at the head of the Ille men.

He was pale, but calm and resolute. Thenceforth he did not make a single mistake, and the Spaniards were thoroughly beaten. It was a fine sight to see the enthusiasm of the on-lookers: some uttered a thousand cries of joy and threw their bonnets in the air; others pressed his hands, calling him the honour of their country. If he had repelled an invasion, I doubt whether he would have received more lively or more sincere congratulations. The disappointment of the losers added still more to the brilliance of his victory.

"We'll have other matches, my good fellow," he said to the Aragonese with a tone of superiority; "but I'll give you a handicap."

I could have wished that M. Alphonse had been more modest, and I was almost pained at the humiliation of his rival.

The Spanish giant felt the insult keenly. I saw him turn pale under his sunburnt skin. He looked at his racket gloomily and set his teeth; then, in a choked voice, he said almost inaudibly, "*Me lo pagarás.*"

M. de Peyrehorade's voice disturbed his son's triumph; my host, much surprised not to find him presiding over

the harnessing of the new barouche, was still more surprised to see him all in a sweat, racket in hand. M. Alphonse ran to the house, washed his hands and face, put his new coat and patent-leather shoes on again, and five minutes later we were off at a brisk trot on the way to Puygarrig. All the tennis-players of the town and a great number of on-lookers followed us with cries of joy. The strong horses which drew us had difficulty in keeping ahead of those intrepid Catalans.

We were at Puygarrig, and the procession was about to set out for the mayor's office, when M. Alphonse struck his forehead, and said to me in an undertone:

"How stupid of me! I've forgotten the ring! It's on the finger of the Venus, the Devil take her! What ever you do, don't mention it to my mother. Perhaps she'll not notice anything."

"You could send somebody," I said.

"Bah! My man is staying behind at Ille. And those fellows here, I don't much trust them. Twelve hundred francs worth of diamonds? That would be a temptation to a good many of them. Besides, what would they think here of my absent-mindedness? They'd make fine fun of me. They'd call me the statue's husband.... I just hope nobody steals it from me! Fortunately the idol has put a fear on my rogues. They don't dare go within arm's length of it. Bah! It doesn't matter; I've got another ring." The two ceremonies, civil and religious, were performed with due pomp; and Mademoiselle de Puygarrig received a little Paris dressmaker's ring, never suspecting that her bridegroom was making the sacrifice of a love-token to her. Then we sat down to table, where we drank, ate, even sang, all at great length. I felt for the bride in the coarse merriment which was resounding about her; still, she kept a better countenance than I had expected, and her embarrassment had nothing either of awkwardness or affectation about it.

Perhaps courage comes with difficult situations.

The breakfast having terminated when it pleased Heaven, it was four o'clock; the men went to walk in the park, which was magnificent, or to watch the Puygarrig peasant-girls dancing on the château lawn arrayed in their holiday clothes. In this way we spent some hours. Meanwhile the women were very busy with the bride, who was making them admire her wedding-presents. Then she changed her dress, and I noticed that she covered up her fine hair with a cap and a feathered hat, for women are in a great hurry until they have assumed as soon as possible the ornaments which custom forbids them to wear as long as they are unmarried.

It was almost eight o'clock when they set about starting for Ille. But first there was a pathetic scene. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig's aunt, who had been a mother to her, a very aged and very devout woman, was not to go to town with us. At her niece's going away she made a touching address to her on the duties of a wife, a discourse which resulted in a torrent of tears and never-ending embraces. M. de Peyrehorade compared this parting to the Rape of the Sabines. We set out, however, and on the way we all did our utmost to distract the bride and make her laugh; but in vain.

At Ille supper was waiting us, and what a supper! If I had been disgusted at the coarse merriment of the morning, I was still more so at the equivocations and pleasantries of which the bridegroom and, above all, the bride were the objects. The bridegroom, who had disappeared for an instant before sitting down to table, was pale and icily serious. Every other minute he took a draught of old Collioure wine, almost as strong as brandy. I was beside him, and I felt obliged to warn him:

"Take care! They say that wine. . . ."

I told him some nonsense or other to put myself on a level with the other guests.

He nudged me with his knee and, in an undertone, said to me:

"When we rise from table . . ., let me have a word with you."

His grave tone surprised me. I looked more attentively at him, and I noticed the strange alteration in his features.

"Do you feel unwell?" I asked him.

"No."

And he fell to drinking again.

Meanwhile, amid shouts and clapping of hands, a child of eleven, who had slipped under the table, showed the company a pretty white and pink ribbon which he had just unfastened from the bride's ankle. That was called her garter. It was at once cut in pieces and distributed to the young people, who decorated their buttonholes with it, after an old custom, which is still maintained in some patriarchal families. This caused the bride to blush to the whites of her eyes. . . . But her distress was at a height when M. de Peyrehorade, having called for silence, sang her certain Catalan verses, impromptu, he said. Here is the sense of them, if I understood it aright:

"What is this, my friends? Has the wine which I have drunk made me see double? There are two Venuses here. . . ."

The bridegroom suddenly looked round with an air of alarm which made everybody laugh.

"Yes," pursued M. de Peyrehorade, "there are two Venuses under my roof. The one, I found in the earth, like a truffle; the other, descended from the skies, has just divided her girdle among us."

He meant her garter.

"My son, choose which you prefer, the Roman Venus or the Catalan Venus. The rascal takes the Catalan, and his choice is the best. The Roman is black, the Catalan is white. The Roman is cold, the Catalan sets every one who approaches her on fire."

This conclusion excited such a roar, such noisy applause and such resounding laughter, that I thought the ceiling was going to fall on our heads. Round the table there were only three solemn faces, the young couple's and my own. I had a bad headache; and besides, for some reason or other, a marriage always depresses me. This one, besides, rather disgusted me.

The last couplets having been sung by the depute mayor—and very free they were, I ought to mention—we went into the drawing-room to witness the retiral of the bride, who was soon to be conducted to her chamber, for it was near midnight. M. Alphonse drew me into a window recess, and said, with averted eyes:

"You will laugh at me.... But I don't know what is wrong with me.... I am bewitched! Devil take me!"

The first thought which came into my head was that he imagined himself threatened with some misfortune similar to those mentioned by Montaigne and Madame de Sévigné:

"The whole Empire of Love is replete with tragic histories, etc."

"I thought that sort of accidents never happened except to persons of intelligence," I said to myself.

"You've drunk too much Collioure, my dear Monsieur Alphonse," I said to him. "I warned you."

"Yes, perhaps. But this is something much more dreadful."

His voice was broken. I really thought he was drunk.

"You know my ring?" he continued after a pause.

"What! Has it been taken away?"

"No."

"Then you have it, have you not?"

"No . . . I . . . I can't get it off that devil of a Venus's finger."

"A fine story! You've not pulled hard enough."

"Not at all.... But the Venus.... She has closed her finger."

He stared at me with a haggard face, supporting himself by the window-fastening to keep himself from falling.

"A pretty tale!" I said to him. "You have pushed the ring too far on. You'll get it off to-morrow with pincers. But take care not to spoil the statue."

"I tell you no! The Venus's finger is turned in, crooked in; she has her hand clenched, do you understand?... She is my wife, it seems, since I have given her my ring.... She won't give it back now."

I felt a sudden shiver, and for an instant my flesh crept. Then a great sigh that he gave sent a reek of wine over to me, and all my emotion disappeared.

"The silly fool," thought I, "is quite drunk."

"You are an antiquary, sir," the bridegroom added in a lamentable tone; "you know about those statues ... perhaps there is some spring, some devilment, that I don't know about.... Would you go and see?"

"Willingly," I said. "Come along with me."

"No, I'd rather you went alone."

I went out of the drawing-room. The weather had changed during supper, and the rain was beginning to fall heavily. I was about to ask for an umbrella, when a thought arrested me. I should be a great fool, I said to myself, to go and verify what a drunk man had told me! Besides, he perhaps wished to play some ill-natured joke on me to make me a laughing-stock for those good provincials; and the least that would result to me from it would be to get soaked to the skin and catch a bad cold.

From the door I cast a glance at the statue all running with water, and I went upstairs to my room without returning to the drawing-room. I went to bed; but sleep was long of coming. All the scenes of the day presented themselves to my mind. I thought of that young girl, so lovely and so pure, left to the mercy of a brutal drunkard. "What an odious thing," I said to myself, "a marriage of convenience is! A mayor puts on a

tricolour scarf, a parson a stole, and there, the most respectable girl in the world is handed over to the Minotaur! What can two beings who do not love each other have to say to each other at a moment such as this, a moment which two lovers would purchase at the price of their lives? Can a woman ever love a man whom she has once seen coarse? First impressions are never effaced, and I am sure of this, that that M. Alphonse will richly deserve to be hated. . . ."

During my monologue, which I have shortened considerably, I had heard a great deal of coming and going in the house, doors opening and shutting, carriages driving away; then I seemed to have heard the light steps of a number of women on the stair, making for the end of the corridor opposite to my room. It was probably the bride's attendants taking her to bed. In course of time they had gone downstairs again. Madame de Peyrehorade's door was shut. How anxious and uneasy that poor girl must be, I thought! I turned about on my bed in a bad temper. A bachelor cuts a foolish figure in a house where a marriage is being held.

Silence reigned for some time; then it was broken by heavy steps climbing up the stair. The wooden treads cracked loudly.

"The brute!" I exclaimed. "I'll wager he's going to fall on the stairs."

All became quiet again. I took a book to change the course of my thoughts. It was a statistical account of the department, graced with a memorandum by M. de Peyrehorade on the druidical monuments of the Prades hundred. I fell over at the third page.

I slept badly, and woke several times. It might be about five o'clock in the morning, and I had been awake twenty minutes or more, when the cock crew. Day was about to dawn. Just then I heard distinctly the same heavy steps, the same cracking of the stair, that I had heard before falling asleep. It struck me as

strange. I yawned and tried to think why M. Alphonse was rising so early in the morning. I could imagine no likely reason. I was about to close my eyes again, when my attention was excited anew by a strange trampling, with which the ringing of bells and the sound of doors being noisily opened soon mingled; then I made out confused cries.

"My drunk friend has set the house afire somewhere!" I thought, as I jumped down out of bed.

I dressed in a hurry and went out into the corridor. From the opposite end came cries and lamentations, and one heartrending voice dominated all the others—"My son! My son!" It was evident that some calamity had happened to M. Alphonse. I ran to the nuptial chamber: it was full of people. The first thing that met my view was the young man half-clad, stretched across the bed, the frame of which was broken. He was livid and motionless. His mother was weeping and crying at his side. M. de Peyrehorade was busy, rubbing his temples with eau-de-Cologne, or holding smelling-salts to his nose. Alas! his son had been dead for a long time. On a sofa at the other end of the room was the bride, writhing in horrible convulsions. She was uttering inarticulate cries, and two strong servants had the utmost difficulty in holding her.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "whatever has happened?"

I went up to the bed and raised the unfortunate young man's body; it was already stiff and cold. His clenched teeth and his blackened face gave evidence of the most frightful agony. It was only too plain that his end had been violent and his death-struggles terrible. Yet there was no trace of blood on his clothes. I opened his shirt, and on his chest I saw a livid mark, which was continued round his ribs and back. One would have thought that he had been crushed in a band of iron.

My foot trod upon something hard on the carpet; I stooped down, and saw the diamond ring.

I drew M. de Peyrehorade and his wife into their room; then I had the bride taken there.

"You have still a daughter," I said to them, "you owe her your care." Then I left them alone.

There seemed to me no doubt that M. Alphonse had been the victim of a murder, the perpetrators of which had found means to let themselves in to the bride's room at night. Yet those bruises on his chest and their circular direction puzzled me considerably, for a stick or an iron bar could not have produced them. All at once I remembered to have heard that the bravos of Valencia make use of long bags of leather, stuffed with fine sand, to knock down the persons whom they have been paid to kill. I immediately remembered the Aragonese muleteer and his threat; at the same time I scarcely dared to think that he had taken such a terrible revenge for a harmless joke.

I went about the house, searching everywhere for traces of breaking in, without finding them anywhere. I went down to the garden, to see whether the murderers could have got in from that side; but I found no certain traces there. Besides last night's rain had so soaked the earth that it could not have retained any very sharp impression. All the same, I observed some footprints deeply imprinted in the ground; they were in two contrary directions, but in the same line, starting from the corner of the hedge beside the tennis-court and ending at the house-door. They might have been made by M. Alphonse when he went to look for his ring on the statue's finger. On the other hand, the hedge at that place was not so close as elsewhere; that must have been the spot where the murderers crossed it. Passing and repassing before the statue, I halted for a moment to look at it. This time, I confess, I could not contemplate its expression of ironical wickedness without fear; and, my head full of the horrible scenes which I had just witnessed, I seemed to behold an infernal deity

applauding the misfortune which had overtaken that house.

I got back to my room and remained there until midday. Then I went to inquire for my hosts. They were a little more composed. Mademoiselle de Puygarrig—I ought to say M. Alphonse's widow— had recovered consciousness. She had even spoken with the public prosecutor from Perpignan, who was then on circuit at Ille, and that official had taken her deposition. He asked for mine. I told him what I knew, and did not conceal my suspicions about the Aragonese muleteer. He ordered him to be arrested at once.

"Have you learned anything from Madame Alphonse?" I asked the public prosecutor, when my deposition had been written and signed.

"That unhappy young lady has gone out of her mind," he said to me with a sad smile. "Out of her mind! Quite out! Here's her story.

"She had been in bed, she says, for some minutes, with the curtains drawn, when the door of her room opened, and some one came in. Madame Alphonse was then on the far side of the bed, with her face to the wall. She did not move, being sure that it was her husband. An instant later the bed groaned as if it was loaded with an enormous weight. She was very much afraid, but did not dare to turn her head. Five minutes, ten minutes perhaps—she could form no notion of the time—passed thus. Then she made an involuntary movement, or rather the person who was in the bed made one, and she felt the contact of something as cold as ice, these are the expressions she used. She buried herself in the far side of the bed, trembling in every limb. Shortly afterwards the door opened a second time, and some one entered, who said, 'Good evening, my little wife.' Very soon after, the curtains were drawn aside. She heard a smothered cry. The person who was in the bed beside her sat up, and seemed to stretch forward his arms.

She turned her head then . . . and saw, she declares, her husband on his knees at the bed-side, his head level with the pillow, in the arms of a sort of greenish giant who was hugging him with violence. She says, and she has repeated it to me a score of times, poor woman ! . . . she says that she recognized . . . can you guess ? The bronze Venus, M. de Peyrehorade's statue. . . . Since it came into the neighbourhood, every one dreams about it. But to resume the unhappy madwoman's story. At that sight she lost consciousness, and probably she had already lost her reason some time before. She is quite unable to say how long she continued in her faint. When she came to herself, she still saw the phantom, or the statue, as she always calls it, motionless, its legs and the lower part of its body in the bed, its bust and arms stretched over, and in its arms her husband, without movement. A cock crew. The statue then got out of the bed, let fall the corpse, and went out. Madame Alphonse tore at the bell-pull, and you know the rest."

They brought up the Spaniard; he was calm, and defended himself with much coolness and presence of mind. To be sure, he did not deny the saying which I had heard; but he explained that all he meant by it was that, next day, when he was rested, he would have won a tennis-match from his conqueror. I recollect that he added:

"When an Aragonese is affronted, he does not wait till the next day to avenge himself. If I had thought that M. Alphonse meant to insult me, I would have given him one in the belly with my knife on the spot."

They compared his shoes with the footprints in the garden; his shoes were very much larger.

Finally the innkeeper, with whom the man had lodged, affirmed that he had spent the whole night rubbing and dosing one of his mules that was sick.

Moreover, this Aragonese was a man of good reputation, well known in the neighbourhood, to which he came

every year on his business. So they released him and made their excuses to him.

I forgot the deposition of a servant, who had been the last to see M. Alphonse in life. It was at the moment when he was about to go upstairs to his wife, and, calling the servant, he had asked him with an air of anxiety, if he knew where I was. The servant answered him that he had seen nothing of me. M. Alphonse then heaved a sigh, and remained speechless for more than a minute, then he said, "*Well, I declare, the devil must have taken him away too!*"

I asked this man whether M. Alphonse had his diamond ring when he spoke to him. The servant hesitated about answering; at last he said that he thought no, but that he really had not paid any attention.

"If he had had the ring on his finger," he added, correcting himself, "I should certainly have noticed it, for I thought that he had given it to Madame Alphonse."

While questioning this man I felt something of the superstitious terror which Madame Alphonse's deposition had spread all through the house. The public prosecutor looked at me with a smile, and I took good care not to say anything more.

Some hours after M. Alphonse's funeral, I made ready to leave Ille. M. de Peyrehorade's carriage was to take me to Perpignan. In spite of his weak condition, the poor old man insisted on accompanying me to the gate of his garden. We crossed it in silence, he dragging himself along painfully, leaning on my arm. At the moment of our parting, I cast a last look on the Venus. I could well foresee that my host, although he did not share the terror and hatred with which it inspired a part of his family, would wish to rid himself of an object which would remind him unceasingly of a fearful calamity. My intention was to get him to promise to place it in a museum. I was hesitating about how to broach the matter, when M. de Peyrehorade mechanically turned

his head in the direction in which he saw me looking fixedly. He caught sight of the statue, and at once burst into tears. I embraced him, and, without venturing to say a single word to him, got into the carriage.

Since my departure I have not learned that the slightest fresh light has been shed upon this mysterious catastrophe.

M. de Peyrehorade died some months after his son. By his will he bequeathed to me his manuscripts, which I shall perhaps publish some day. I have found no trace whatever among them of the paper dealing with the inscriptions on the Venus.

P.S.—My friend M. de P. has just written to me from Perpignan that the statue no longer exists. After her husband's death, Madame de Peyrehorade's first care was to have it melted down and made into a bell, and in this new form it is doing duty at the church of Ille. But, adds M. de P., it would appear that ill luck pursues the owners of that bronze. Since this bell began to ring at Ille the vines have twice been frosted.

THE STORY OF A WHITE BLACKBIRD

ALFRED DE MUSSET

I

How glorious, but how distressing a thing it is to be an exceptional blackbird in this world! I am by no means a fabulous bird, and M. de Buffon has described me. But, alas! I am extremely rare, and very difficult to find. Would God I had been utterly undiscoverable!

My father and mother were two good souls, who had lived for a number of years at the bottom of a secluded old garden in the Marais. Theirs was an exemplary household. While my mother, squatted in a thick bush, laid regularly three times a year, and sat on her eggs, dozing, with patriarchal devotion, my father, still very tidy and very smart despite his great age, kept pilfering around her all day long, bringing her fine insects which he held delicately by the tip of the tail, so as not to disgust his wife, and, when night came, he never failed, if the weather was fine, to regale her with a song, which rejoiced the whole neighbourhood. Never a quarrel, never the least cloud, had disturbed that sweet union.

Scarcely had I come into the world, when my father, for the first time in his life, began to show bad temper. Although I was as yet only a dubious grey, he failed to recognize in me either the colour, or the form of his numerous posterity.

"There's a dirty child," he would sometimes say,

looking askance at me; "it looks as if that ragamuffin must go and poke himself into every mortar-heap and mud-heap he comes across, that he is always so ugly and bespattered."

"Eh, dear me, my friend," answered my mother, always curled into a ball in an old bowl, of which she had made her nest, "don't you see that it's all you can expect at his age? In your young days, weren't you a charming little pickle yourself? Let our blackbirdie grow, and you'll see how handsome he'll be; he's one of the best I ever laid."

Although thus taking my side, my mother was under no delusion; she saw the growth of my fatal plumage, which to her appeared a monstrosity; but she did as mothers do, who often become partial to their infants because of the very thing in which they are hardly used by Nature, as if the fault were their own, or as if they could repel in advance the injustice of fortune which must strike their children.

When the time of my first moult came, my father turned very pensive indeed, and considered me attentively. So long as my feathers were coming out, he continued to treat me kindly enough, and even gave me some paste when he saw me shivering almost naked in a corner; but as soon as my poor numbed wings began to get a new covering of down, with each white feather he saw appear, he flew into such a rage that I was afraid he'd pluck me for the rest of my days. Alas! I had no mirror; I knew not the cause of his anger, and I asked myself why the best of fathers showed himself so barbarous to me.

One day, when a ray of sunshine and my sprouting plumage had, despite me, stirred my heart to joy, as I was fluttering about in an alley, I started, unfortunately for me, to sing. The first note that my father heard, he sprang up in the air like a rocket.

"What is that I hear there?" he exclaimed. "Is

that how a blackbird whistles? Is that how I whistle? Is that whistling?"

And, alighting beside my mother with a most terrible countenance:

"Wretch!" he said, "who has been laying in your nest?"

At these words my mother darted, deeply insulted, out of her bowl, not without doing some damage to one foot; she tried to speak, but her sobs choked her; she fell on the ground half swooning. I saw her at the point of death; terrified and trembling with fear I threw myself at my father's knees.

"O my father!" I said to him, "though I whistle wrong, and though I am wrongly clad, don't let my mother be punished for it! Is it her fault if Nature has denied me a voice like yours? Is it her fault if I have not your handsome yellow beak and your fine black French coat, which make you look like a churchwarden swallowing an omelette? If Heaven has made a monster of me, and if some one must be punished for it, let me at least be the only one to suffer!"

"That is not the question," said my father. "What is the meaning of the absurd way in which you have just now presumed to whistle? Who taught you to whistle like that, contrary to all custom and all rule?"

"Alas! sir," I answered humbly, "I whistled as I could, because I felt merry that it was fine weather, and perhaps because I had eaten too many flies."

"We don't whistle like that in my family," retorted my father, beside himself. "For centuries we have whistled from father to son, and, when I make my voice heard in the night, let me tell you that there is an old gentleman here on the first floor and a little work-girl in the attic, who open their windows to listen to me. Is it not enough to have before my eyes the frightful colour of your ridiculous feathers, which give you a powdered look, like a clown at a fair? If I were not

the most peaceable of blackbirds, I would have plucked you naked a hundred times before now, for all the world like a barn-door fowl ready for the spit."

"Why then!" I exclaimed, revolted at my father's injustice, "if that is the case, sir, don't let that stand in your way! I will take myself off from your presence, I will spare your eyes the sight of this unfortunate white tail by which you drag me about all day long. I will depart, sir, I will flee; plenty other children will console your old age, since my mother lays three times a year; I will go far from you to hide my misery, and perhaps," I added sobbing, "perhaps I shall find, in some neighbour's kitchen-garden, or on the gutters, some earth-worms or some spiders to maintain my sad existence."

"As you will," replied my father, far from being softened at this speech; "let me never see you again! You are not my son; you are not a blackbird."

"And what am I then, sir, if you please?"

"I have no idea, but you are not a blackbird."

After these crushing words, my father went off with slow steps. My mother rose sadly, and went limping to have her cry out in her bowl. As for me, confounded and overcome, I took my flight as best I could, and I went, as I had announced, to perch myself on the gutter of a neighbouring house.

II

My father had the inhumanity to leave me for several days in this mortifying situation. In spite of his violence, he had a good heart, and, from the stolen looks which he directed towards me, I saw well that he would have liked to pardon me and recall me; my mother especially looked up to me constantly with eyes full of fondness, and sometimes even ventured to call me with a little plaintive cry; but my horrible white plumage caused them, in spite of themselves, a repugnance and

a terror for which, I saw well, there was no remedy whatever.

"I am not a blackbird!" I repeated; and, in fact, when preening myself in the morning and gazing at my reflection in the water of the gutter, I recognized only too clearly how little I resembled my family. "O Heaven!" I repeated again, "do tell me what I am!"

One night, when it was raining in torrents, I was about to go to sleep, worn out by hunger and vexation, when I saw a bird settle beside me, more drenched, more pallid, and more lean than I thought possible. He was about my colour, so far as I could judge in the rain which was deluging us, he had scarcely feathers enough on his body to clothe a sparrow, and he was bigger than myself. He seemed to me, at first sight, a poor and necessitous bird indeed; but, in spite of the storm which maltreated his almost clean-plucked brow, he preserved an air of pride which charmed me. I modestly made him a profound reverence, to which he responded with a peck of his bill, which all but threw me down off the gutter. Seeing that I scratched my ear and took myself off with compunction, without trying to answer him in his own language:

"Who are you?" he asked in a voice which was as hoarse as his skull was bald.

"Alas, your Lordship," I answered (fearing a second thrust), "I have no idea. I thought I was a blackbird, but they have convinced me that I am not one."

The singularity of my answer, and my air of sincerity, interested him. He came beside me, and made me tell my story, a task of which I acquitted myself with all the sadness and all the humility which were suitable to my position and the fearful weather which we were having.

"If you were a carrier-pigeon like me," he said, after having heard me, "the petty annoyances at which you distress yourself would not disturb you one moment.

We travel, that is our life, and we have our loves, it is true, but I do not know who my father is. To cleave the air, to traverse space, to see the mountains and plains beneath our feet, to breathe the very azure of the heavens, not the exhalations of the earth, to fly like the arrow to an appointed mark which never escapes us, that is our pleasure and our existence. I travel farther in one day than a man can do in ten."

"Upon my word, sir," I said, somewhat emboldened, "you are a Bohemian bird."

"That's another thing about which I don't much trouble," he replied. "I have no country at all; I know only three things: my travels, my wife, and my little ones. Where my wife is, there is my country."

"But what have you hanging there at your neck? It's like an old, tattered curl-paper."

"These are papers of importance," he replied, puffing himself out; I am going to Brussels this trip, and I am taking news to the celebrated banker X—— which will make the funds fall one franc seventy-eight centimes."

"Gracious goodness!" I exclaimed, "it is a fine life yours, and Brussels, I am sure, must be a town well worth seeing. Could you not take me with you? Since I am not a blackbird, I am perhaps a carrier-pigeon."

"If you were one," he replied, "you would have returned that peck which I gave you a moment ago."

"Why, sir, I'll return it to you; don't let us quarrel over such a trifle. See, the morning is appearing and the storm is subsiding. Pray let me follow you! I am lost, I have nothing left me in the world;—if you refuse me, there is nothing for it but to drown myself in this gutter."

"Very well then, go ahead! Follow me if you can."

I took a last look at the garden where my mother was sleeping. A tear rolled from my eyes; the wind and rain carried it away. I spread my wings, and set out.

III

My wings, I have said, were not very strong yet. While my guide went like the wind, I panted at his side; I kept up for some time, but soon such a violent dizziness seized me that I felt as if I should faint.

"Is there far to go yet?" I asked in a weak voice.

"No," he answered me, "we are at Bourget; we have only sixty leagues to do now."

I tried to take fresh courage, not wishing to look like a draggled hen, and flew another quarter of an hour, but, for once, I was done up.

"Sir," I stammered afresh, "couldn't we stop here a moment? I have a horrible thirst, which is torturing me, and, if we perched on a tree. . . ."

"Go to the devil! You're a blackbird!" answered the carrier-pigeon in a rage.

And, without deigning to turn his head, he continued his journey in high dudgeon. As for me, dazed and blind, I fell into a corn-field.

I do not know how long my faint lasted. When I recovered consciousness, the first thing that I remembered was the carrier-pigeon's last words; "You're only a blackbird," he had told me.—"Oh my dear parents," I thought, "you were wrong then! I will return to you; you will recognize me as your true and lawful child, and you will restore me my place in that dear little heap of leaves which is below my mother's bowl."

I made an effort to rise; but the fatigue of my journey and the pain which I felt from my fall paralysed all my limbs. Scarcely had I stood up on my feet, when the faintness seized me once more and I fell again on my side.

The frightful thought of death was already presenting itself to my mind, when, across the cornflowers and poppies, I saw two charming persons coming towards me on tiptoe. One was a little magpie, very neatly

marked and extremely coquettish, and the other a rose-coloured turtle-dove. The turtle halted some paces from me, with an intense air of modesty and of compassion for my misfortune; but the magpie came up to me hopping in the most graceful manner in the world.

"Eh, dear me, poor child, what are you doing there?" she asked me in a playful and silvery voice.

"Alas! my Lady Marchioness," I answered (for she must have been that at least), "I am a poor devil of a traveller whom his postilion has dropped by the roadside, and I am in a fair way of dying of hunger."

"Holy Virgin! Do you tell me so!" she responded.

And she at once began to flit here and there upon the bushes which surrounded us, coming and going from one side to the other, bringing me a quantity of berries and fruits, of which she made a little heap beside me, continuing her questions all the time.

"But who are you? And where do you come from? What an incredible adventure yours is! And where are you going? Fancy travelling alone, so young, for you are only coming out of your first moult! What do your parents do? Where do they come from? How did they come to let you away in that state? Why, it's enough to make one's feathers stand on end!"

While she was talking, I had raised myself a little on one wing, and I ate with a good appetite. The turtle remained motionless, always looking at me with an air of pity. Meanwhile she noticed that I was looking about with an exhausted air, and she understood that I was thirsty. A drop from the rain which had fallen during the night was left on a scrap of pimpernel; she timidly gathered this drop in her beak and brought it to me quite fresh. Certainly, if I had not been so ill, such a reserved person would never have ventured on such a proceeding.

I did not yet know what love was, but my heart beat violently. Divided between two varying emotions, I

was possessed by an inexplicable pleasure. My table-maid was so gay, my cup-bearer so effusive and gentle, that I could have wished to go on breakfasting thus to all eternity. Unfortunately everything has an end, even a convalescent's appetite. The repast finished and my strength restored, I satisfied the little magpie's curiosity and related my misfortunes to her with as much sincerity as I had told them the evening before to the pigeon. The magpie listened to me with more attention than seemed natural to her, and the turtle gave me some charming tokens of her profound sensibility. But when I came to touch on the prime cause of my troubles, that is to say my ignorance as to what I was:

"Are you joking?" the pie exclaimed; "You a blackbird! You a pigeon! Fie! you are a magpie, my dear child, a magpie, if ever there was one—and a very pretty magpie," she added, giving me a little blow with her wing, a tap with her fan, so to speak.

"But, my Lady Marchioness," I answered, "it seems to me that, for a magpie, my colour, if you'll excuse me saying so . . ."

"A Russian magpie, my dear; you are a Russian magpie! Don't you know that they are white? Poor boy, what innocence!"

"But, madam," I replied, "how should I be a Russian magpie, when I was born in the Marais in an old broken bowl?"

"Ah! the dear child! You are one of the invaders, my dear; do you fancy that you are the only one? Leave it to me, and do as I bid you; I'll take you with me this very hour, and show you the finest things in the world."

"Where is that, madam, if you please?"

"In my green palace, my darling; you'll see what a life we lead there. You'll not have been a magpie a quarter of an hour, before you'll want to hear tell of no other thing. There are a hundred of us there; not

those great village magpies, who beg alms on the high roads, but all noble and well-bred, slim, active, and no bigger than a fist. Not one of us but has neither more nor less than seven black bars and five white bars; that is an invariable rule, and we despise everybody else. You have not the black marks, it is true, but your quality of Russian will be enough to secure your admission. Our life is spent in two things, chattering and tittivating. From morning to midday we tittivate, and from midday to evening we chatter. Each of us perches on a tree, as lofty and old as possible. In the middle of the forest rises an immense oak, uninhabited alas! It was the dwelling of the late King Pie X., whither we used to go in pilgrimage, heaving mighty great sighs; but, apart from this little sadness, we pass the time wonderfully. Our wives are not prudes, any more than our husbands are jealous, but our pleasures are pure and honest, because our heart is as noble as our language is frank and joyous. Our pride has no bounds, and, if a jay or any other low fellow should chance to thrust himself in among us, we pluck him without mercy. But that does not prevent us from being the best neighbours in the world, and the sparrows, the tomtits, and the goldfinches, who live in our copses, find us always ready to help them, to feed them, and to defend them. Nowhere is there more chattering than among us, and nowhere less evil speaking. We are not without some old devotee magpies, who say their paternosters all day long, but the giddiest young gossip among us can pass, without fear of a peck, close to the severest dowager. In a word, we live on pleasure, on honour, on gossip, on glory, and on dress."

"That is very fine indeed, madam," I replied, "and I should certainly be ill-advised not to obey the orders of a person like you. But, before having the honour of following you, allow me, by your leave, to say a word to this good young lady here. Mademoiselle," I con-

tinued, addressing myself to the turtle, "tell me frankly, I entreat you, do you think that I am really a Russian magpie?"

At this question, the turtle hung down her head, and turned pink, like Lolotte's ribbons.

"Why, sir," she said, "I don't know if I can. . . ."

"In Heaven's name, speak, mademoiselle! I have not the slightest intention of offending you, quite the contrary. You both look so charming to me, that I here and now vow to offer my heart and my claw to whichever of you will accept it, the moment I know if I am a magpie or something else; for, when I look at you," I added, speaking in a lower tone to the young lady, "I feel a something of the turtle-dove about me, which torments me strangely."

"Why, to be sure," said the turtle, blushing still more, "I do not know if it is the reflection of the sun striking on you through these poppies, but your plumage does seem to me to have a slight tint. . . ."

She did not venture to say more.

"O perplexity!" I exclaimed, "how am I to know what to believe? How give my heart to one of you, when it is so cruelly torn asunder? O Socrates! how admirable, but how hard to follow, the principle thou hast given us, when thou saidst, 'Know thyself!'"

Since the day when my unfortunate song had so enraged my father, I had never made use of my voice. At this juncture it came into my mind to employ it as a means of discerning the truth. "By Jove," thought I, "since my father put me to the door after the first couplet, the least the second can do is to produce some effect on these ladies!" Having, then, commenced by bowing politely, as if to request their indulgence because of the rain which I had come through, I began first of all to whistle, then to warble, then to do roulades, then at last to sing at the pitch of my voice, like a Spanish muleteer in full blast.

The longer I sang, the farther and farther the little magpie made off from me with an air of surprise, which soon became stupefaction, then turned into a feeling of terror mingled with profound weariness. She described circles round about me, like a cat about a piece of scalding hot bacon which has just burned her, but which she wishes to taste again. Seeing the effect of my experiment, and wishing to carry it out to the end, the more impatience the poor Marchioness showed, the more I sang myself hoarse. She resisted my melodious efforts for five-and-twenty minutes; at last, unable to stand them any longer, she flew away noisily and returned to her palace of verdure. As for the turtle, she had been sound asleep almost from the first.

"Admirable effect of harmony!" I reflected. "O Marais! O maternal bowl! More than ever my thoughts return to you!"

At the moment when I was spreading my wings to depart, the turtle reopened her eyes.

"Adieu," she said, "stranger, so polite and so tiresome! My name is Guruli; remember me!"

"Beauteous Guruli," I answered, "you are good, gentle and charming; I would live and die for you. But you are rose-colour; such happiness is not meant for me!"

IV

The unfortunate effect produced by my song did not fail to sadden me. "Alas, music; alas, poesy!" I repeated on my way back to Paris, "How few hearts there are which comprehend you!"

Whilst making these reflections, I bumped my head against another bird's who was flying in the opposite direction to me. The shock was so violent and so unexpected that we both fell down on a tree-top, which, by good luck, was there. After shaking ourselves a bit, I eyed the new comer, expecting a quarrel. I was sur-

prised to see that he was white. To tell the truth, he had a head somewhat bigger than myself, and over his brow a sort of crest, which gave him a mock-heroic appearance. Besides that, he carried his tail well up in the air, with great magnanimity; however, he did not seem at all disposed to do battle. We addressed each other very civilly, and made our mutual excuses, after which we entered into conversation. I took the liberty of asking him his name and what country he came from.

"I am astonished," he said to me, "that you do not know me. Are you not one of us?"

"To tell the truth, sir," I answered, "I do not know whom I belong to. Every one asks me and says the same thing to me; it must be a wager that they have made."

"You are joking," he said; "your plumage becomes you too well for me not to recognize a brother. You belong unmistakably to that illustrious and venerable race which is entitled in Latin *cacatua*, in learned language *kakatoës*, and in vulgar jargon cockatoo."

"Faith, sir, that is possible, and it would be a great honour indeed for me. But do not let that prevent you from acting as if I were not one, and have the condescension to inform me whom I have the honour of addressing."

"I am," responded the unknown, "the great poet Kacatogan. I have made mighty travels, sir, arid passages, and cruel peregrinations. It was not yesterday that I began to rhyme, and my Muse has had her misfortunes. I have warbled under Louis XVI., sir, I have bawled for the Republic, I have nobly sung the Empire, I have discreetly lauded the Restoration, I have even made an effort in these last times, and have submitted, not without difficulty, to the exigencies of this tasteless century. I have launched on the world piquant distichs, sublime hymns, gracious dithyrambs, pious elegies, long-haired dramas, woolly romances, powdered vaudevilles,

and bald tragedies. In a word, I can flatter myself with having added to the Temple of the Muses some gallant festoons, some sombre battlements, and some ingenious arabesques. What more do you want? I have grown old. But I still rhyme vigorously, sir, and such as you see me now, I was dreaming over a poem in one canto, which would be at least six pages long, when you gave me a bump on my brow. Nevertheless, if I can help you in any way, I am entirely at your service."

"Indeed you can, sir," I replied, "for you find me at this moment in a serious poetical difficulty. I do not presume to say that I am a poet, still less a great poet, such as you," I added, bowing to him, "but Nature has endowed me with a throat, which itches when I am at ease or when I am vexed. To tell you the truth, I am absolutely ignorant of the rules."

"I have forgotten them," said Kacatogan, "don't worry yourself about that."

"But an annoying thing happens to me," I replied; "my voice produces an effect on those who hear it, almost the same as that which a certain Jean de Nivelle's produced on . . . You know what I mean?"

"I know," said Kacatogan; "I have seen this odd effect in my own experience. The cause of it is unknown to me, but the effect is indisputable."

"Well then, sir, you who seem to me to be the Nestor of poesy, can you suggest, I entreat you, a remedy for this painful drawback?"

"No," said Kacatogan, "for my own part, I have never been able to find one. I was much exercised about it when I was young, because they always hissed me; but nowadays I have ceased to think about it. I suspect that this repugnance arises from what the public reads by others than ourselves: that distracts its attention."

"I am of your opinion; but you will agree, sir, that it is very hard for a well-intentioned creature to put

people to flight the moment a good impulse seizes him. Would you be so kind as do me the service of listening to me, and giving me your frank opinion?"

"Most willingly," said Kacatogan; "I am all ears."

I at once began to sing, and I had the satisfaction of seeing that Kacatogan neither fled nor fell asleep. He stared at me fixedly, and from time to time nodded his head with an air of approval, and with a sort of murmur of commendation. But I soon saw that he was not listening to me, and was dreaming of his poem. Taking advantage of a moment when I was taking breath, he interrupted me all at once.

"I have found that rhyme after all!" he cried, smiling and wagging his head; "it is the sixty-thousand-seven-hundred-and-fourteenth that has come out of this brain of mine! And they have the audacity to say that I am ageing! I'll go and read it to my kind friends, I'll go and read it to them, and we'll see what they have to say to it!"

So speaking, he took flight and disappeared, apparently having quite forgotten that he had met me.

V

Left alone and disappointed, the best thing I could do was to take advantage of what was left of the day, and fly at the full stretch of my wings towards Paris. Unfortunately I did not know my way. My journey with the pigeon had been too agreeable to leave me with any very exact recollection; so, instead of going straight on, I turned to the left at Bourget, and, overtaken by the night, was obliged to seek a resting-place in the woods of Morfontaine.

They were all going to bed when I arrived. The magpies and jays, who, as every one knows, are the worst bedfellows in the world, were squabbling on every hand. In the bushes the sparrows were chirruping and treading one upon another. At the water's edge two

herons were stalking gravely, perched on their long stilts, in the attitude of meditation, the George Dandins of the place, waiting patiently for their wives. Some enormous crows, half asleep, were settling themselves heavily on the tops of the highest trees, and were snuffling their evening prayers. Lower down, the amorous tits were still pursuing one another in the copses, whilst a dishevelled woodpecker was pushing her family from behind to make them go into the hollow of a tree. Troops of hedge-sparrows returned from the fields, dancing in the air like puffs of smoke, and swooping down upon a shrub, which they covered entirely; chaffinches, warblers, redbreasts arranged themselves lightly on detached branches, like the crystals on a chandelier. On every hand voices resounded, saying as plainly as could be: "Come, my wife! Come, my girl!—Come to me, my fair one!—This way, my sweet!—Here I am, my dear!—Good evening, my mistress!—Adieu, my friends!—Sound sleep, my children!"

What a situation for a bachelor to have to sleep in such a guest-house! I was tempted to attach myself to some birds of my own build, and ask hospitality of them. "At night," I reflected, "all birds are grey; and, besides, does one do any harm to people by sleeping politely beside them?"

I made my way first of all to a ditch, where the starlings were assembling. They were dressing for the night with very great care, and I noticed that the most of them had gilded wings and varnished claws; they were the dandies of the forest. They were good enough fellows, and did not honour me with any attention. But their talk was so empty, and they related their petty quarrels and their conquests with such fatuity, and made up to one another so clumsily, that it was impossible for me to stay there.

I next went to perch myself on a branch where half a dozen birds of different sorts were in a row. I

modestly took the last place, at the extremity of the branch, in the hope that they would tolerate me. As ill luck would have it, my neighbour was an old dove, as dry as a rusty weather-cock. At the moment when I came near her, the few feathers which covered her bones were the object of her solicitude; she pretended to preen them, but she was too much afraid of pulling one out; she merely passed them in review to see if she had her count. Scarcely had I touched her with the tip of my wing, when she drew herself up majestically.

"What do you mean, sir?" she said to me, compressing her beak with a modesty quite British.

And, fetching me a great nudge with her elbow, she sent me down with a vigour that would have done honour to a porter.

I fell into a clump of heather, where a fat woodhen was sleeping. My own mother in her bowl did not have such an air of bliss. She was so plump, so full-blown, so well set on her triple stomach, that one would have taken her for a pie off which the crust had been eaten. I crept furtively in beside her. "She won't wake," I said to myself, "and in any case such a good fat mammy can't be very cross." No more she was. She half opened her eyes, and said to me, with a slight sigh:

"You're bothering me, child; go away."

At the same instant I heard some one calling me: it was some thrushes who were making signs to me from the top of a mountain-ash to come to them. "Here are some kind souls at last," I thought. They made room for me, laughing like mad, and I slipped into their feathery group as promptly as a love-letter into a muff. But I was not long in concluding that those ladies had eaten more grapes than was wise; they could scarcely support themselves on the branches, and their ill-bred jokes, their outbursts of laughter and their decidedly free songs forced me to take my departure.

I began to despair, and I was about to go to sleep in a solitary corner, when a nightingale began to sing. Everybody at once became silent. Alas! how pure his voice was, how his very melancholy appeared sweet! So far from disturbing the slumbers of others, his harmonies seemed to lull them to sleep. No one dreamt of silencing him, no one found fault with him for singing his song at such an hour; his father did not beat him, his friends did not take flight.

"Is there no one, then, but me," I cried, "who is forbidden to be happy? Let us depart, let us flee this cruel world! Better to seek my way amid the darkness, at the risk of being devoured by some owl, than to let myself be thus tortured by the sight of others' happiness.

With this thought I set out again, and wandered a long time at random. With the first streak of day I descried the towers of Notre Dame. In the twinkling of an eye I had reached it, and I did not cast my eyes around long before I recognized our garden. I flew thither quicker than lightning.... Alas, it was empty!... I called in vain for my parents: no one answered me. The tree where my father used to post himself, the maternal bush, the dear bowl, all had disappeared. The axe had destroyed everything; instead of the green alley where I was born, there remained only a hundred of faggots.

VI

At first I searched for my parents in all the gardens round about, but it was wasted labour; they had without doubt taken refuge in some far-off quarter, and I should never be able to get news of them.

Overcome by a dreadful sorrow, I went to perch myself on the gutter to which my father's anger had first exiled me. I passed days and nights there in deploring my sad existence. I had no more sleep, I scarcely ate: I was like to die of grief.

One day, when I was lamenting as usual:

"So then," I said aloud, "I am neither a blackbird, for my father plucked me; nor a pigeon, since I fell by the way when I wanted to go to Belgium; nor a Russian magpie, since the little Marchioness stopped her ears the moment I opened my beak; nor a turtle-dove, since Guruli, even the good Guruli, snored like a monk when I was singing; nor a parrot, since Kacatogan did not deign to listen to me; nor a bird of any kind, in short, since at Morfontaine they let me sleep all by myself. And yet I have feathers on my body; here are claws and here are wings. I am no monster, witness Guruli, and even the little Marchioness, who found me quite to their taste. By what inexplicable mystery can these feathers, these wings, these claws not form a total to which a name might be given? Can I not by any chance be . . ."

I was about to continue my lamentations, when I was interrupted by two market-women disputing in the street.

"Why, hang me," said one of them to the other, "if you ever manage it, I'll make you a present of a white blackbird!"

"Merciful Heaven!" I exclaimed, "that's my case. O Providence! I am the son of a blackbird, and I am white: I am a white blackbird!"

This discovery, it must be acknowledged, altered my ideas considerably. Instead of continuing to lament my lot, I began to puff out my chest and march proudly up and down the gutter, looking into space with a victorious air.

"It's something," I said to myself, "to be a white blackbird: that isn't found in a donkey's stride. I was very simple to distress myself at not finding my like: it is the fate of genius, it is mine! I meant to flee the world: now I mean to astonish it! Since I am this bird without a peer, of which the vulgar deny the existence, I ought, and I mean, to comport myself as such, nothing more or less than the Phœnix, and to

despise the rest of the winged race. I must buy the memoirs of Alfieri and the poems of Lord Byron; that substantial pabulum will inspire me with a noble pride; without reckoning that which God has given me. Yes, I mean to add, if that is possible, to the lustre of my birth. Nature has made me rare; I will make myself mysterious. It will be a favour, a glory, to see me. And, indeed," I added in a lower tone, "supposing I show myself frankly for money?

"But shame! What an unworthy thought! I mean to make a poem, like Kacatogan, not in one canto, but in twenty-four, like all the great men; that is not enough, there will be forty-eight, with notes and an appendix! The universe must learn of my existence. I shall not fail, in my verses, to deplore my loneliness; but I shall do it in such a way that the most fortunate will envy me. Since Heaven has refused me a mate, I will say frightful evil of those of others. I will prove that everything is too sour, except the grapes which I eat. The nightingales must look to themselves; I will demonstrate, as sure as two and two make four, that their complaints make one sick, and that their wares are worth nothing. I must go and find Charpentier. I mean to establish a strong literary position for myself at the very start. I intend to have a court about me composed not only of journalists, but of real authors and even of women writers. I'll write a rôle for Mademoiselle Rachel, and, if she refuses to take it, I'll publish with sound of trumpet that her talent is much inferior to that of an old provincial actress. I will go to Venice and I'll hire on the banks of the Grand Canal, in the heart of that fairy city, the beautiful Mocenigo Palace, which costs four livres ten sous a day; there I will inspire myself with all the souvenirs which the author of 'Lara' must have left in it. From the depth of my solitude I will inundate the world with a deluge of alternate rhymes, modelled on the Spenserian stanza,

wherewith I shall solace my great soul; I shall make all the tomtits sigh, all the turtles coo, all the woodcocks dissolve in tears, and all the old screech-owls screech. But, as regards my own person, I will prove inexorable and inaccessible to love. In vain will they press me, supplicate me to have pity on the unfortunates whom my sublime songs have led astray; to all that I will answer 'Faugh!' O superabundance of glory! My manuscripts will sell for their weight in gold, my books will traverse the seas; renown, fortune, will attend me everywhere; I alone shall seem indifferent to the murmurs of the crowd which will surround me. In one word, I will be a perfect white blackbird, a veritable eccentric author, fêted, petted, admired, envied, but utterly surly and insupportable."

VII

It did not take me more than six weeks to give my first work to the world. It was, as I had promised myself, a poem in forty-eight cantos. True there were some negligences in it owing to the prodigious fecundity with which I had written it; but I reckoned that the public of to-day, accustomed as it is to the elegant literature at the foot of the newspapers, would not reproach me with them.

I had a success worthy of myself, that is to say, without its like. The subject of my work was nothing else than myself: in this respect I conformed to the height of fashion of our day. I related my past sufferings with a charming fatuity; I informed the reader of a thousand domestic details of the most piquant interest; the description of my mother's bowl filled no less than fourteen cantos: I counted its grooves, its holes, its lumps, its chips, its splinters, its nails, its stains, its different colours, its reflections; I showed its inside, its outside, its edges, its bottom, its sides, its inclined planes and its level planes; passing to its contents, I gave

studies of the tufts of grass, the straws, the dried leaves, the little scraps of wood, the pebbles, the drops of water, the remains of flies, the broken cockchafers' legs, which were to be found there; it was a ravishing description. But do not imagine that I had it printed all in a piece; there are impertinent readers who would have skipped it. I had cleverly cut it into pieces, and worked it into the narrative in such a fashion that none of it was lost; so that at the most interesting and most dramatic moment, all of a sudden there came fifteen pages of bowl. There, in my opinion, is one of the great secrets of the art, and, as there is not the least trace of avarice about me, any one who likes may profit by it.

All Europe was in a stir at the appearance of my book; it devoured the intimate revelations which I condescended to communicate to it. How could it have been otherwise? Not only did I enumerate all the facts relative to my person, but I also gave the public a complete picture of all the moonshine that I had passed through my head since the age of two months; I had even intercalated, in the best place, an ode composed by me in the egg. At the same time, it is needless to say that I did not neglect, in passing, to discuss the great subject which is occupying the world so much nowadays, to wit, the future of the human race. This problem had struck me as interesting; in a leisure moment I had sketched a solution of it, which passed generally for satisfying.

Every day people sent me compliments in verse, letters of congratulation, and anonymous declarations of love. As for visits, I adhered rigorously to the plan which I had traced for myself; my door was shut to every one. Still, I could not debar myself from seeing two strangers who announced themselves as relations of mine. One was a blackbird from Senegal, and the other a blackbird from China.

"Ah, sir!" they said to me, embracing me like to choke me, "what a great blackbird you are! How well you have depicted, in your immortal poem, the deep-seated suffering of misunderstood genius! If we were not as unappreciated as possible already, we should become so after having read you. How we sympathize with your griefs, with your sublime contempt of the vulgar. We also, sir, we know from our own experience the secret pains which you have sung! Here are two sonnets which we have composed, such as they are, and which we beg you to accept."

"Here also," said the Chinese, "is some music which my wife has composed on a passage in your preface. It expresses the author's intention most wonderfully."

"Gentlemen," I said to them, "so far as I can judge, you appear to me to be endowed with a great heart and an enlightened mind. But excuse me asking you a question. Whence proceeds your melancholy?"

"Why, sir," replied the inhabitant of Senegal, "look how I am built. My plumage, it is true, is pleasant to look at, and I am clad in that handsome green colour which is seen shining on ducks; but my beak is too short and my foot too large; and see what a tail I am rigged out with! The length of my body does not make two-thirds of it. Is that not reason enough to wish oneself dead and done with?"

"And as for me, sir," said the Chinese, "my misfortune is even more distressing. My brother's tail sweeps the streets; but the street-boys point their finger at me because I have no tail at all."

"Gentlemen," I replied, "I pity you with all my soul; it is always annoying to have too much or too little of anything, no matter what it is. But permit me to tell you that in the Zoological Gardens there are several persons who resemble you, and who have stayed there a long time very peaceably, stuffed. Just as it is not enough for a woman author to cast aside all

modesty in order to write a good book, no more is it enough for a blackbird to be discontented in order to have genius. I am the only one of my kind; and I grieve over the fact; perhaps I am wrong, but I am within my rights. I am white, gentlemen; become the same, and we'll see what you'll be able to say."

VIII

In spite of the resolution which I had formed and the calm which I had affected, I was not happy. My isolation, though glorious, did not seem to me less painful, and I could not reflect without dread on the necessity, under which I found myself, of passing all my life in celibacy. The return of spring, in particular, caused me mortal discomfort, and I was beginning to relapse into my old melancholy, when an unforeseen circumstance decided my whole life.

It need hardly be said that my writings had crossed the Channel, and that the English made a run upon them. The English make a run upon everything, except the things they understand. One day I received a letter from London, signed by a young lady blackbird: "I have read your poem," she said to me, "and the admiration which I felt has caused me to form the resolution of offering you my hand and my person. God has created us for each other! I am like you, I am a white young lady blackbird! . . ."

My surprise and my joy may be easily imagined. "A white young lady blackbird!" I said to myself. "Is it really possible? Then I am no longer alone upon the earth!" I hastened to reply to the fair unknown, and I did so in a manner which showed plainly enough how much her offer was to my mind. I pressed her to come to Paris, or to permit me to fly to her. She replied that she preferred to come herself, because her parents bored her, that she was arranging her affairs, and that I should see her very soon.

She did indeed come some days later. O joy! she was the prettiest lady blackbird in the world, and she was even whiter than myself.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, "or rather madam, for I regard you from this moment as my lawful wife, is it credible that such a charming creature should have existed on the earth without fame informing me of her existence? Blessed be the misfortunes which I have experienced and the pecks which my father has given me, since Heaven reserved me a consolation so unhoped-for! Until this day I thought myself condemned to an eternal solitude, and, to speak frankly to you, it was a heavy burden to bear; but when I see you I feel within me all the qualities of a father of a family. Accept my hand without delay; let us be married English fashion, without ceremony, and go away together to Switzerland."

"I won't hear of that," said the young lady blackbird; "I mean our marriage to be magnificent, and all the blackbirds in France, who are anything like well-born, to be solemnly gathered to it. People like us owe it to their own reputation not to get married like cats in the gutter. I have brought a supply of bank-notes with me. Write out your invitations, go to your tradesmen, and don't be stingy with the refreshments."

I conformed blindly to the white lady blackbird's orders. Our wedding was of overwhelming magnificence; they ate ten thousand flies at it. We received the nuptial benediction from a Reverend Father Cormorant, who was archbishop *in partibus*. The day finished up with a superb ball; in short nothing was wanting to my happiness.

The more deeply I understood the character of my charming wife, the more my love increased. She united in her little person all advantages of soul and body. Her only fault was that she was somewhat strait-laced; but I attributed this to the influence of the English fogs

in which she had lived hitherto, and I had no doubt that the climate of France would soon dissipate this slight cloud.

A thing which disquieted me more seriously was a sort of mystery, in which she sometimes wrapped herself with singular strictness, locking herself in with her lady's maids, and so passing hours together at her toilette, as she pretended. Husbands do not much like such whims in their households. A score of times it happened that I knocked at my wife's apartments without getting the door opened. This vexed me cruelly. One day I insisted with so much ill temper, that she found herself obliged to accede and open to me for a moment, not without complaining bitterly of my importunity. I noticed, on entering, a great bottle full of a sort of paste made with flour and Spanish whiting. I asked my wife what she did with that concoction, and she replied that it was a soothing application for some chilblains that she had.

This soothing application seemed to me just a little suspicious; but what distrust could be excited in me by a person so gentle and discreet, who had surrendered herself to me with such enthusiasm and such perfect sincerity? I did not know at first that my well-beloved was a woman of the pen; she made the avowal in course of time, and she even went so far as to show me the manuscript of a novel in which she had imitated at one and the same time Walter Scott and Scarron. I leave you to imagine the agreeable surprise which such a discovery caused me. Not only did I see myself the possessor of an incomparable beauty, but I also acquired the certainty that the intelligence of my companion was in every respect worthy of my genius. From that moment we worked together. While I composed my poems, she blotted reams of paper. I recited my verses to her aloud, which did not in the least hinder her from writing all the time. She laid her novels with a facility almost equal to my own, always choosing the most dramatic

subjects, parricides, rapes, murders, and even knaveries, always taking care to attack the Government by the way and to preach the emancipation of women blackbirds. In a word, no task was too great for her mind, no daring too much for her modesty; she never once had to strike out a line or to form a plan before setting to work. She was the type of the literary woman blackbird.

One day when she was applying herself to her work with unaccustomed ardour, I noticed that she was sweating great drops, and I was astonished to see at the same time that she had a great black stain on her back.

"Why, good gracious," I said to her, "whatever is that? Are you unwell?"

She seemed rather frightened, and even put out at first; but her great experience of the world soon helped her to regain the admirable command which she always exercised over herself. She told me that it was a spot of ink, and that she was very liable to it in her moments of inspiration.

"Can it be that my wife is going off colour?" I asked myself in a whisper. This thought prevented me from sleeping. The bottle of paste came to my mind. "O Heaven!" I exclaimed, "What a suspicion! Can this celestial creature be nothing but a painting, a touch of whitewash? Can she have varnished herself to impose upon me? . . . When I thought I was pressing to my heart the sister of my soul, the privileged being created for me alone, can it be that I wedded nothing but flour?"

Haunted by this horrible doubt, I formed a plan for delivering myself from it. I made the purchase of a barometer, and waited eagerly for it to be a wet day. I meant to take my wife to the country, to choose a doubtful Sunday, and try the experiment of a drenching. But we were in the middle of July; it was frightfully fine weather.

The semblance of happiness and the habit of writing had stimulated my sensibility exceedingly. Artless as I was, it sometimes happened, when I was at work, that sentiment was stronger than thought, and I began to weep whilst waiting for a rhyme. My wife loved those rare occasions immensely: any masculine weakness charms feminine pride. One night when I was polishing an erasure, according to Boileau's precept, it so happened that I opened my heart.

"O thou!" I said to my dear lady blackbird, "thou, my only and best beloved! Thou without whom my life is a dream, thou whose look, whose smile metamorphoses the universe for me, life of my heart, knowest thou how much I love thee? A little study and attention would easily enable me to find words to put into verse a commonplace idea, already worn threadbare by other poets; but where will I ever find them to express that with which thy beauty inspires me? Could the memory of my past pains, even, furnish me with a word to describe to thee my present happiness? Before thou camest to me, my isolation was that of an orphan in exile; to-day it is that of a king. In this feeble body, of which I have the form until death make of it a ruin, in this fevered little brain, where an unavailing thought ferments, dost thou know, my angel, dost thou comprehend, my fair one, that there can be nothing but what is thine? Hear what little my brain can express, and understand how much greater is my love! O that my genius were a pearl, and that thou wert Cleopatra!"

Whilst raving thus, I shed tears on my wife, and she changed colour visibly. At each tear that dropped from my eyes, appeared a feather, not even black, but of the most faded russet (I do believe she had already bleached herself elsewhere). After some minutes of tender outpouring, I found myself in presence of a bird stripped of paste and flour, exactly like the most common and everyday blackbirds.

What could I do or say? what measures could I take? Reproaches were useless. No doubt I was fully entitled to consider the matter redhibitory and have my marriage declared null; but how dare to publish my shame? Had I not misfortune enough already? I took my courage in my claws, I resolved to forsake the world, to abandon my literary career, to flee into a desert, if that were possible, to shun for ever the sight of a living creature, and to seek, like Alceste,

> . . . some solitary place,
> Where a white blackbird may be white in perfect peace!

IX

Thereupon I flew away, always weeping; and the wind, which is the Fate of birds, bore me to a branch in Morfontaine. This time they were all in bed.—"What a marriage!" I said to myself, "What a business! No doubt it was with a good intention that the poor child made herself white; but I am none the less to be pitied, and she is none the less russet."

The nightingale was singing again. Alone, in the bosom of the night, he was enjoying whole-heartedly his divine gift, which makes him so superior to the poets, and was uttering his thought freely to the silence that surrounded him. I could not resist the temptation of going up to him and addressing him.

"How happy you are!" I said to him. "Not only do you sing as much as you wish, and very well, too, and all the world listens to you; but you have a wife and children, your nest, your friends, a good pillow of moss, full moon, and no newspapers. Rubini and Rossini are nothing compared to you: you are as good as the one, and you anticipate the other. I too have sung, sir, and it was pitiable. I have drawn up words in serried rows like so many Prussian soldiers, I have strung stale commonplaces together, while you were in the wood. Is your secret to be discovered?"

"Yes," the nightingale replied to me, "but it is not what you imagine. My wife bores me, I do not love her at all; I am in love with the rose; Sadi the Persian has mentioned it. I sing myself hoarse for her all night long, but she sleeps and does not hear me. Her chalice is shut at the present moment: she is nursing an old beetle in it—and to-morrow morning, when I reach my bed worn out with suffering and fatigue, then she will spread herself out to let a bee devour her heart!"

VANINA VANINI;

OR, PARTICULARS OF THE LAST LODGE OF CARBONARI DISCOVERED IN THE PAPAL STATES

"STENDHAL" (HENRY BEYLE)

ONE evening in the spring of 182– all Rome was in a stir: the Duke of B——, the famous banker, was giving a ball at his new palace in the Piazza Venezia. The utmost magnificence that the arts of Italy and the luxury of Paris and London could produce had been brought together to embellish the palace. The throng was immense. The blonde, reserved beauties of noble England had solicited the honour of being present at this ball; they arrived in crowds. The handsomest women in Rome disputed the prize of beauty with them. A young girl, whom the brilliance of her eyes and her ebon hair proclaimed a Roman, entered escorted by her father; all eyes followed her. A singular pride shone in all her movements.

The strangers as they entered were visibly impressed by the magnificence of the ball. "None of the fêtes of the kings of Europe comes anywhere near this," they said.

The kings have not a palace of Roman architecture: they are obliged to invite the great ladies of their courts; the Duke of B—— only invites pretty women. That evening he had been happy in his invitations; the men seemed dazzled. Among so many remarkable

women the difficulty was to decide who was the handsomest. The choice for some time remained undecided; but at last the Princess Vanina Vanini, the young girl with the black hair and the eye of fire, was proclaimed queen of the ball. At once the strangers and the young men of Rome, abandoning all the other saloons, formed a crowd in the one where she was.

Her father, Prince Asdrubale Vanini, had wished her to dance first with two or three German sovereigns. After that she accepted the invitations of some Englishmen, very handsome and very noble; their air of solemnity wearied her. She evidently found more pleasure in tormenting young Livio Savelli, who seemed deeply in love. He was the most magnificent young man in Rome, and, what was more, he too was a prince; but, if you had given him a novel to read, he would have thrown the volume away after twenty pages, saying that it gave him a headache. That was a disadvantage in Vanina's eyes.

About midnight a piece of news spread through the ball and produced a great stir. A young carbonaro, who had been confined in the Castle of Sant' Angelo, had just escaped that very night by means of a disguise; and, with an excess of romantic daring, on arriving at the last ward of the prison, he had attacked the soldiers with a poniard; but he himself had been wounded; the police were tracking him through the streets by his blood, and they hoped to find him.

As this anecdote was being told, Don Livio Savelli, dazzled by the graces and the triumphs of Vanina, with whom he had just been dancing, said to her as, almost beside himself with love, he led her back to her place:

"But, really, who could please you?"

"That young carbonaro who has just escaped," Vanina answered him; "he at least has done something more than take the trouble of being born."

Prince Don Asdrubale came up to his daughter. He

was a rich man, who for the last twenty years had not taken reckoning with his steward, who lent him his own revenues at a very high rate of interest. If you met him in the street, you would have taken him for an old actor; you would not have observed that his hands were ornamented with five or six enormous rings set with big diamonds. His two sons had become Jesuits and afterwards died insane. He had forgotten them; but he was vexed that his only daughter Vanina would not marry. She was now nineteen, and had refused the most brilliant matches. What was her reason? The same as Sulla's for abdicating: *her contempt for the Romans.*

The day after the ball, Vanina noticed that her father, the most careless of men, who had never in his life taken the trouble to carry a key, very carefully shut the door of a little stair which led to some rooms on the third floor of the palace. The windows of these rooms looked on to a terrace adorned with orange-trees. Vanina went to pay some visits in Rome; on her return, the main entrance of the palace was blocked by the preparations for an illumination, so the carriage went in by the courts at the back. Vanina looked up, and saw to her astonishment that one of the windows of the rooms which her father had shut with such care was open. She got rid of her companion, climbed to the top of the palace, and searched about until she found a little grated window, which gave a view of the terrace ornamented with orange-trees. The open window that she had noticed was close beside her. That room must certainly be occupied; but by whom? Next day, Vanina managed to obtain the key of a little door which opened on to the terrace ornamented with orange-trees.

She stealthily approached the window, which was still open. A sun-shutter helped to cover it. Inside the room was a bed and some one in the bed. Her first impulse was to withdraw; but she caught sight of a woman's dress thrown on a chair. Looking more closely

at the person in the bed, she saw that she was fair and apparently very young. She had no more doubt about its being a woman. The dress thrown down on the chair was stained with blood; there was blood on the woman's shoes, too, laid on a table. The stranger moved; Vanina perceived that she was wounded. A large cloth, spotted with blood, covered her breast; the cloth was only kept on with ribbons; it was no surgeon's hand that had fixed it so. Vanina noticed that every day, about four o'clock, her father shut himself up in his room, then went to see the stranger; he soon came downstairs again, and took the carriage to visit the Countess Vitteleschi. Immediately he had gone, Vanina climbed up to the little terrace from which she could see the stranger. Her feelings were actively excited in favour of this most unfortunate young woman; she tried to guess at her adventure. The blood-stained dress thrown on a chair seemed to have been pierced with dagger-thrusts. Vanina could count the rents. One day she saw the stranger more distinctly: her blue eyes were gazing towards heaven; she seemed to be praying. Soon tears filled her lovely eyes; the young princess could scarcely refrain from speaking to her. The next day Vanina summoned up courage to hide herself in the little terrace before her father arrived. She saw Don Asdrubale go into the stranger's room; he carried a little basket containing provisions. The prince seemed to be disturbed and did not say much. He spoke so low that, although the sash of the window was open, Vanina could not make out what he said. He went away immediately.

"The poor woman must have some very terrible enemies," said Vanina to herself, "that my father, who is usually so careless, dares not trust anybody, and takes the trouble of climbing a hundred and twenty steps every day."

One evening when Vanina softly advanced her head in the direction of the stranger's window, she met her

eyes, and all was discovered. Vanina fell on her knees, and exclaimed:

"I love you; I am at your service!"

The stranger signed to her to come in.

"I owe you many apologies!" exclaimed Vanina. "How offensive my foolish curiosity must seem to you! I swear secrecy, and, if you insist on it, I shall never return."

"Who would not be happy to see you?" said the stranger. "Do you live in this palace?"

"Of course," replied Vanina; "but I see you do not know me; I am Vanina, Don Asdrubale's daughter."

The stranger looked at her in astonishment, blushed deeply, and then added:

"Permit me to hope that you will come and see me every day; but I should like the prince not to know of your visits."

Vanina's heart beat fast; the stranger's manners seemed to her full of distinction. This poor young woman had no doubt offended some powerful person. Had she, perhaps, in a moment of jealousy, killed her lover? Vanina could not conceive of a commonplace reason for her misfortune. The stranger told her that she had received a wound in the shoulder, which had penetrated to her chest and was causing her much suffering. She often found her mouth full of blood.

"Yet you have no surgeon?" exclaimed Vanina.

"You are aware," said the stranger, "that at Rome the surgeons have to give the police an exact report of all the wounds that they treat. The prince condescends to bind up my wounds with his own hands, in the cloth which you see."

With the most perfect grace, the stranger avoided any bemoaning over her accident; Vanina loved her to madness. One thing, however, astonished the young princess greatly, namely that, in the middle of a conversation which was certainly serious enough, the

stranger had great difficulty in suppressing a sudden desire to laugh.

"I should be happy," said Vanina," to know your name."

"They call me Clementine."

"Well, dear Clementine, to-morrow at five o'clock I'll come and see you."

Next day, Vanina found her new friend very ill.

"I want to get a surgeon to you," said Vanina, embracing her.

"I would rather die," said the stranger. "Why should I wish to compromise my benefactors?"

"The surgeon to Monsignore Savelli-Catanzara, the governor of Rome, is the son of one of our servants," Vanina replied eagerly; "he is devoted to us, and, in his position, is afraid of no one. My father does not do justice to his fidelity; I am going to send for him."

"I don't want any surgeon," the stranger exclaimed, with a sharpness which surprised Vanina. "Come and see me; and, if God must call me to Himself, I shall die happy in your arms."

Next day, the stranger was still worse.

"If you love me," said Vanina, as she left her, "you'll see a surgeon."

"If he comes, my happiness is gone."

"I'm going to send for one," replied Vanina.

Without a word, the stranger detained her and took her hand, which she covered with kisses. There was a long silence; the stranger's eyes were full of tears. At last she let go Vanina's hand, and, with the air with which she might have gone to her death, said to her:

"I have a confession to make to you. The day before yesterday I told you a lie when I said I was Clementine; I am an unfortunate carbonaro ——

Vanina, astonished, pushed back her chair and stood up at once.

"I am aware," continued the carbonaro, "that this

confession will cause me to lose the only good thing that attaches me to life; but it is unworthy of me to deceive you. I am called Pietro Missirilli; I am nineteen years old; my father is a poor surgeon at Sant' Angelo in Vado, for my part I am a carbonaro. Our lodge was surprised; I was brought, in chains, from Romagna to Rome. Buried in a dungeon lighted night and day by a lamp, I passed thirteen months there. A charitable soul conceived the idea of rescuing me. They dressed me in women's clothes. As I was coming out of prison and was passing the warders at the last door, one of them cursed the carbonari; I gave him a slap. I assure you that this was not a piece of vain bravado, but simply thoughtlessness. Pursued through the streets of Rome at night after this imprudence, wounded with bayonets, fast losing my strength, I rushed up the stairs of a mansion, the door of which was open; I heard the soldiers coming up after me; I sprang into the garden; I fell down only a few paces from a woman who was walking there."

"The Countess Vitteleschi, my father's friend!" said Vanina.

"What! Has she told you?" exclaimed Missirilli. "In any case, the lady, whose name must never be uttered, saved my life. As the soldiers came into her house to seize me, your father took me out of it in his carriage. I feel very ill; for some days this bayonet-wound in my shoulder has prevented me from breathing. I am going to die, in despair, too, because I shall not see you again."

Vanina had listened with impatience; she went out hastily: Missirilli could discover no pity in her fine eyes; only the expression of a haughty character which had been wounded.

At night, a surgeon appeared; he was alone. Missirilli was in despair; he feared that he would never see Vanina again. He questioned the surgeon, who bled him

and gave him no answer. The succeeding days, the same silence. Pietro's eyes never left the terrace-window by which Vanina had been accustomed to enter; he was very unhappy. Once, about midnight, he thought he saw some one in the shadow on the terrace: was it Vanina?

Vanina came every night to press her cheek against the young carbonaro's window-panes.

"If I speak to him," she said to herself, "I am lost! No, I must not see him again!"

Having taken this resolution, she recalled, in spite of herself, the fondness which she had conceived for the young man when she so foolishly took him for a woman. And now, after so sweet an intimacy, she must forget him! In her more reasonable moments, Vanina was terrified at the change which had taken place in her thoughts. Since Missirilli had named himself, all the things she had been accustomed to think about were as if covered with a veil, and seemed very far away.

A week had not passed before Vanina, pale and trembling, entered the young carbonaro's room with the surgeon. She came to tell him that the prince must be made to promise to let a servant take his place. She did not remain ten seconds; but some days afterwards she came back again with the surgeon, out of humanity. One night, though Missirilli was much better and Vanina had no longer the excuse of fearing for his life, she ventured to come alone. Nothing could exceed Missirilli's happiness at seeing her, but he thought to conceal his love; above all, he did not wish to forget the dignity of a man. Vanina, who had come to his room covered with blushes and afraid she would have to listen to words of love, was disconcerted by the noble and devoted, but far from tender, friendliness with which he received her. She went away without his trying to detain her.

Some days after, when she returned, the same conduct, the same assurances of respectful devotion and eternal

gratitude. So far from having to put a curb on the young carbonaro's transports, Vanina asked herself if she alone was in love. This young girl, till then so proud, bitterly felt the extent of her folly. She affected gaiety, even coldness, came less often, but could not bring herself to cease seeing the young invalid.

Missirilli, burning with love, but remembering his obscure birth and his duty towards himself, had vowed never to descend to talking of love unless Vanina remained a week without seeing him. The young princess's pride disputed every foot of the way.

"Well," she said to herself at last, "if I see him, it is on my own account, it is for my amusement, and I will never avow the interest with which he inspires me."

She paid long visits to Missirilli, who talked with her as he might have done if twenty people had been present. One night, after having spent the whole day in detesting him and promising herself to be even colder and severer than usual to him, she told him that she loved him. Soon she had nothing left to refuse him.

Though her folly was great, it must be owned that Vanina was perfectly happy. Missirilli had no more thought of what he considered due to his dignity as a man; he loved as they love for the first time at nineteen and in Italy. He had all the scruples of passionate love, even to the extent of acknowledging to the proud young princess the policy which he had employed to make her fall in love with him. He was astonished at the excess of his happiness. Four months passed only too quickly. One day the surgeon gave the invalid his liberty. "But what am I to do?" thought Missirilli. "Am I to remain in hiding under the roof of one of the handsomest women in Rome? And the vile tyrants who kept me thirteen months in prison without letting me see the light of day will think they have broken my spirit! Italy, thou art unfortunate indeed, if thy children abandon thee for so little!"

Vanina never doubted that Pietro's greatest happiness would be to remain attached to her for ever; he seemed only too happy; but a saying of General Bonaparte rankled in the young man's soul and influenced all his conduct towards women. In 1796, when General Bonaparte was leaving Brescia, the magistrates, who accompanied him to the gate of the town, said to him that the Brescians loved liberty more than all other Italians.

"Yes," he answered, "they love to talk about it to their mistresses."

Missirilli said to Vanina with some constraint:

"As soon as it is night, I must go out."

"Take good care to be in the palace again before daybreak; I'll wait for you."

"At daybreak I'll be several miles from Rome."

"Indeed," said Vanina coldly, "and where are you going to?"

"To Romagna, to take my revenge."

"Seeing that I am rich," Vanina said with the calmest air imaginable, "I hope that you will accept some arms and some money from me."

Missirilli looked at her for a moment without moving a muscle; then, throwing himself into her arms:

"Soul of my soul, you make me forget everything else, even my duty. But, the nobler your heart is, the better you should understand me."

Vanina wept copiously, and it was settled that he should not leave Rome for another two days yet.

"Pietro," she said to him next day, "you have often told me that a well-known man, a Roman prince for example, who had command of plenty of money, could render great service to the cause of liberty, if ever Austria should be involved in any great war at a distance from us."

"Undoubtedly," said Pietro in astonishment.

"Well then, you have courage; all you lack is position: I am going to offer you my hand and two hundred

thousand livres a year. I undertake to get my father's consent."

Pietro threw himself at her feet; Vanina was radiant with joy.

"I love you passionately," he said; "but I am a poor servant of my country; and, the unhappier Italy is, the more faithful I must be to her. To obtain Don Asdrubale's consent, I should have to play a sorry part for many years. Vanina, I refuse you."

Missirilli was in a hurry to commit himself by this speech. His courage threatened to fail him.

"My misfortune," he exclaimed, "is that I love you more than life, that to leave Rome is the worst of tortures for me. Ah! why is Italy not delivered from the barbarians? With what pleasure I should embark along with you to go and live in America!"

Vanina remained as if frozen. This refusal of her hand had astonished her pride; but soon she cast herself into Missirilli's arms.

"You never seemed so dear to me as now," she exclaimed; "yes, my little country surgeon, I am yours for ever. You are a great man, like our ancient Romans."

All ideas of the future, all the gloomy suggestions of good sense disappeared; there was a moment of perfect love. When they were able to talk sensibly, Vanina said:

"I shall be in Romagna almost as soon as you. I'll get sent to the baths at Poretta. I will stop at our castle at San Nicolo, near Forli——"

"There I'll spend my life with you!" exclaimed Missirilli.

"My part in future is to dare everything," Vanina resumed with a sigh. "I shall ruin myself for you, but what matter—— Could you love a woman who has lost her honour?"

"Are you not my wife?" said Missirilli, "and a wife

always adored? I shall know how to love you and protect you.

Vanina had to go and pay visits. Scarcely had she left Missirilli when he began to think his conduct barbarous.

"What is our *country*, after all?" he said to himself. "It is not a being to whom we owe any gratitude for any benefit, and who might be unhappy and curse us if we failed to be grateful. *Country* and *liberty* are like my cloak, a thing that is useful to me, that I must buy, no doubt, if I have not inherited it from my father; but after all I love country and liberty because these two things are useful to me. If I can do nothing with them, if they are no more use to me than a cloak in August, what is the good of buying them, at an enormous price too? Vanina is so beautiful! She has such a remarkable mind! People will seek to please her; she will forget me. What woman ever had only one lover? Those Roman princes, whom I despise as citizens, have such an advantage over me! They must be very lovable! Ah, if I go away, she will forget me, and I shall lose her for ever!"

In the middle of the night Vanina came to see him; he told her of the indecision in which he had been plunged, and the examination to which, because he loved her, he had subjected the great word *country*. Vanina was very happy.

"If he had to choose definitely between his country and me," she said to herself, "the choice would fall on me."

The clock of the neighbouring church struck three; the moment of their last farewells arrived. Pietro tore himself from the arms of his beloved. He was already descending the little stair, when Vanina, restraining her tears, said to him with a smile:

"If you had been tended by some poor countrywoman, would you not do something out of gratitude? Would

you not try to repay her? The future is uncertain; you are going to travel amidst enemies; give me three days out of gratitude, as if I were a poor woman, and in repayment of my trouble."

Missirilli remained. At last he quitted Rome. Thanks to a passport bought from a foreign embassy, he reached his home. There was great rejoicing; they had given him up for dead. His friends wished to celebrate his safe return by killing one or two carabineers, as the police in the Papal states are called.

"Do not let us kill an Italian that knows the use of arms, unless we are forced to," said Missirilli; "our country is not an island, like happy England: we need soldiers to resist the intervention of the kings of Europe."

Shortly afterwards, Missirilli, hard pressed by the carabineers, killed two of them with the pistols that Vanina had given him. A price was set on his head.

Vanina did not make her appearance in Romagna: Missirilli thought he was forgotten. His vanity was hurt; he began to dwell on the difference of rank which separated him from his mistress. In a moment of softening and regret for his past happiness, he took the notion of returning to Rome to see what Vanina was doing. This mad thought was on the point of prevailing over what he believed to be his duty, when one evening the bell of a mountain-church sounded the angelus in a strange fashion, as if the ringer were preoccupied. It was the signal for the meeting of the lodge of carbonari to which Missirilli had been affiliated on his arrival in Romagna. That same night, they all met in a certain hermitage in the woods. The two hermits, stupefied with opium, had no suspicion of the use that was being made of their little dwelling. Missirilli, who arrived very downcast, learned that the head of the lodge had been arrested, and that he, a young man of barely twenty, was to be elected head of a lodge which included men

over fifty, who had been engaged in the conspiracies since Murat's expedition of 1815. Pietro felt his heart beat at receiving this unexpected honour. As soon as he was alone, he resolved to think no more of the young Roman lady who had forgotten him, and to consecrate all his thoughts to *delivering Italy from the barbarians.*[1]

Two days later, Missirilli saw in the list of arrivals and departures sent to him as head of the lodge that the Princess Vanina had just arrived at her castle of San Nicolo. To read this name caused more trouble than pleasure to his soul. In vain he thought to make sure of his fidelity to his country by restraining himself from hastening that very night to the castle of San Nicolo; the thought of Vanina whom he was neglecting prevented his fulfilling his duties in a reasonable fashion. He saw her the next day; she loved him as she had done at Rome. Her father, who wished to marry her, had hindered her departure. She brought two thousand sequins with her. This unexpected assistance helped wonderfully to establish Missirilli in his new dignity. Thanks to them they got daggers made in Corfu, they gained over the confidential secretary of the legate charged with pursuing the carbonari, and also obtained the list of parish priests who served as spies to the government.

It was at this period that one, not the most unreasonable, of the conspiracies that have been attempted in unhappy Italy was finally organized. I shall not enter into details that would be out of place here. I shall content myself with saying that, if the enterprise had been crowned with success, Missirilli would have been able to claim a great share of the glory. According to it several thousand insurgents would have risen at a given signal, and awaited under arms the arrival of their

[1] "*Librar l'Italia de' barbari,*" a saying of Petrarch's in 1350, afterwards repeated by Julius II., by Machiavelli, and by Count Alfieri.

superior heads. The decisive moment was at hand, when, as always happens, the conspiracy was paralysed by the arrests of the leaders.

Vanina had not long arrived in Romagna when she fancied she could see that love of country would make her lover forget all other love. The young Roman's pride was chafed. She tried in vain to reason with herself; black disappointment took possession of her; she found herself cursing liberty. One day when she had come to Forli to see Missirilli, she was no longer mistress of her grief, which, so far, her pride had always been able to master.

"Really," she said to him, "you love me like a husband; that's not what I want."

Her tears soon began to flow; but they were tears of shame at having descended to reproaches. Missirilli responded to her tears like one preoccupied. All at once it occurred to Vanina to leave him and return to Rome. She found a cruel joy in punishing herself for the weakness which had just made her speak. After some moments' silence, her mind was made up; she decided that she was unworthy of Missirilli if she did not leave him. She rejoiced in the prospect of his sad surprise when he sought for her at his side, and did not find her. Soon the thought that she had been unable to win the love of the man for whose sake she had committed so many follies revived all her tenderness. She thereupon broke the silence, and did everything in the world to elicit a word of love from him. He said many very tender things to her, with an air of abstraction; but it was with quite a much profounder accent that, talking of his political enterprises, he exclaimed mournfully:

"*Ah, if this affair does not succeed, if the government discovers it this time, I'll give it up!*"

Vanina remained motionless. For an hour and more she had had the feeling that she was seeing her lover for

the last time. His words flashed a fatal ray into her mind. She said to herself:

"The carbonari have already got several thousand sequins from me. There can be no doubt about my devotion to the conspiracy."

Vanina at last roused herself from her reverie, to say to Pietro:

"Will you come and spend twenty-four hours with me at the castle of San Nicolo? Your gathering this evening does not require your presence. To-morrow morning, at San Nicolo, we can walk about; that will calm your agitation and give you all the coolness that you need at such an important juncture."

Pietro consented.

Vanina left him to make preparations for the journey, locking, as usual, the little room in which she hid him.

She hastened to a former waiting-woman of hers, who had left her to get married and set up a small business at Forli. On arriving at this woman's, she hurriedly wrote on the margin of a book of hours, which she found in her room, an exact indication of the place where the lodge of carbonari was to meet that same night. She concluded her denunciation with these words: "This lodge consists of nineteen members; here are their names and addresses." After writing this list, very exact, except that Missirilli's name was omitted, she said to the woman, whom she could depend on:

"Take this book to the Cardinal Legate; let him read what is written and give you back the book. Here are ten sequins; if ever the legate pronounces your name, your death is assured; but you will save my life if you get the legate to read the page I have just written."

Everything succeeded perfectly. The legate's fears prevented him from behaving like a great lord. He let the woman of the people who asked to speak with him appear in his presence masked, but on condition that she had her hands tied. In this state the shopwoman

was brought into the presence of the great person, whom she found entrenched behind an immense table covered with a green cloth.

The legate read the page of the book of hours, holding it well away from him, for fear of some subtle poison. He gave it back to the shopwoman, and did not have her followed. In less than forty minutes after leaving her lover, Vanina, who had seen her former waiting-woman's return, appeared once more to Missirilli, convinced that thenceforth he was entirely hers. She told him that there was an extraordinary commotion in the town; patrols of carabineers were to be seen in streets where they never used to go.

"If you'll take my advice," she added, "we'll start for San Nicolo at once."

Missirilli consented to do so. They walked to the young princess's carriage, which, with her companion, a discreet and well-paid confidante, was waiting for her half a league outside the town.

On arriving at the castle of San Nicolo, Vanina, who was uneasy about the strange step that she had taken, redoubled her tenderness to her lover. But it seemed to her that in talking love to him she was acting a part. The night before, when she played the traitor, she had forgotten about remorse. As she clasped her lover in her arms, she said to herself:

"There is a word that might be uttered in his hearing, and, once it was pronounced, he would have a horror of me at once and for ever."

In the middle of the night, one of Vanina's servants came abruptly into her room. This man was a carbonaro, though she did not suspect it. So, then, Missirilli had secrets from her, even about details like that. She shuddered. The man had come to warn Missirilli that during the night the houses of nineteen carbonari at Forli had been searched, and they themselves arrested the moment they returned from the

lodge. Although taken by surprise, nine had escaped. The carabineers had been able to take ten of them to prison in the citadel. On entering it, one of them had thrown himself down the well, which is very deep, and had killed himself.

Vanina was covered with confusion; fortunately Pietro did not observe it: he could have read her crime in her eyes. . . . "At this very moment," the servant added, "the garrison of Forli is forming a cordon in all the streets. Each soldier is within speaking distance of his neighbour. The inhabitants cannot cross from one side of the street to the other except where an officer is stationed."

After the man had gone, Pietro was pensive, but only for an instant.

"There is nothing that can be done for the moment," he said at last.

Vanina was like to die; she trembled beneath her lover's glance.

"Whatever is wrong with you?" he said at last.

Then he began to think about something else, and ceased to look at her. About the middle of the day, she ventured to say to him:

"That's another lodge discovered; I should think you'll keep quiet for some time now."

"*Very quiet*," Missirilli answered, with a smile that made her shudder.

She went to make a necessary visit to the village priest of San Nicolo, perhaps a spy of the Jesuits. On returning for dinner at seven o'clock, she found the little room where her lover was hidden deserted. Beside herself, she ran all through the house seeking for him; he was not there. In despair she returned to the little room; only then did she catch sight of a note; she read:

"*I am going to surrender myself to the legate; I despair of our cause; Heaven is against us. Who has betrayed us? Apparently the wretch who threw himself into the well. Since*

my life is useless to poor Italy, I do not wish that my comrades, seeing that I alone have not been arrested, should imagine that I have sold them. Adieu; if you love me, think on how to avenge me. Ruin, annihilate, the infamous wretch that has betrayed us, even though he be my father."

Vanina fell into a chair, half-fainting and plunged in the most cruel unhappiness. She was unable to utter a word; her eyes were dry and burning.

At last she flung herself on her knees.

"Great God! accept my vow," she exclaimed; "yes, I will punish the infamous wretch who has been a traitor; but Pietro must first be restored to liberty."

An hour later she was on her way to Rome. Her father had long been urging her to return. During her absence, he had arranged her marriage with Prince Livio Savelli. Vanina had scarcely arrived when he mentioned it to her, trembling. To his great astonishment, she consented at the first word. That same evening, at Countess Vitteleschi's house, her father presented Don Livio almost officially to her; she talked a great deal with him. He was a most elegant young man, and kept the finest possible horses; but, though he was admitted to be clever, his character was supposed to be so light that he was not an object of suspicion to the government. Vanina thought that by first turning his head she would make a convenient agent of him. Since he was nephew to Monsignore Savelli-Catanzara, governor of Rome and minister of police, she supposed that the spies would not presume to follow him.

After having treated the amiable Don Livio exceedingly well for some days, Vanina announced to him that he would never be her husband; he was, according to her, empty-headed.

"If you were not a child," she told him, "your uncle's clerks would have no secrets from you. For example, what has been decided about the carbonari who were discovered recently at Forli?"

Two days later Don Livio came to tell her that all the carbonari taken at Forli had made their escape. She fastened her great black eyes upon him with the bitter smile of most profound contempt, and did not deign to speak to him all that evening. The next day but one Don Livio came to acknowledge to her with a blush that he had been deceived the first time.

"But," he said, "I have got the key to my uncle's study; I have seen from the papers that I found there that a Congregation (or Commission) composed of some of the leading cardinals and prelates is meeting in the strictest secrecy and discussing whether these carbonari should be tried at Ravenna or at Rome. The nine carbonari taken at Forli and their head, one Missirilli, who has been foolish enough to surrender himself, are at the present moment confined in the castle of San Leo.[1]

At the word "foolish," Vanina pinched the prince with all her might.

"I want," she said, "to see the official papers myself, and go into your uncle's study with you; you have most likely read them wrong."

At these words Don Livio shuddered; Vanina was demanding a thing almost impossible; but the young woman's strange genius redoubled his love. A day or two later Vanina, disguised as a man and wearing a pretty little coat of the Savelli livery, was able to spend half an hour amidst the police minister's most secret papers. She felt a thrill of the keenest delight when she discovered the daily report on "Pietro Missirilli, prisoner awaiting trial." Her hands trembled as she held the paper. As she read that name she was on the point of being overcome. When they went out from the governor of Rome's palace Vanina permitted Don Livio to embrace her.

[1] Near Rimini in Romagna. It was in this castle that the famous Cagliostro perished; it is said in the district that he was suffocated there.

"You are coming well out of the tests to which I am submitting you," she said.

After a speech like that the young prince would have set fire to the Vatican to please Vanina. That evening there was a ball at the French ambassador's; she danced a great deal, and almost always with Don Livio. He was intoxicated with happiness; she must not allow him to reflect.

"My father is sometimes strange," Vanina said to him one day. "This morning he dismissed two of his servants, who came to tell me their sorrows. One of them has asked a place with your uncle, the governor of Rome; the other, who has been an artilleryman with the French, would like to be employed in the castle of Sant' Angelo."

"I'll take them both into my service," said the young prince briskly.

"Is that what I asked you?" Vanina replied proudly. "I repeated those poor fellows' petitions word for word; they ought to get what they asked, and not something else."

There was nothing more difficult. Monsignore Catanzara was anything but an imprudent man, and only admitted servants into his house who were well known to him. In the midst of a life apparently full of all manner of pleasures, Vanina, tormented by remorse, was very unhappy. The slowness of events was killing her. Her father's man of business had procured money for her. Ought she to flee from her father's house and go to Romagna, and attempt to get her lover out of prison? Senseless as this notion was she was on the point of carrying it into execution when chance took pity on her.

Don Livio said to her:

"The ten carbonari of Missirilli's lodge are going to be transferred to Rome on the understanding that they are to be executed in Romagna after they have been

condemned. That is what my uncle has got the Pope to sanction this evening. You and I are the only persons in Rome who know this secret. Are you satisfied!"

"You are becoming a man," Vanina replied; "make me a present of your portrait."

The day before Missirilli was due to arrive at Rome Vanina found a pretext for going to Città-Castellana. The prison of that town is where the carbonari spend the night when they are transferred from Romagna to Rome. She saw Missirilli in the morning as he came out of prison. He was chained by himself to a cart; he seemed to her to be pale, but by no means downhearted. An old woman threw a bunch of violets to him; Missirilli smiled her his thanks.

Vanina had seen her lover; all her thoughts seemed renewed; she had fresh courage. A long time ago she had procured a good preferment to the Abbate Cari, the chaplain of the castle of Sant' Angelo, in which her lover was to be confined; she had made this good priest her confessor. At Rome it is no small thing to be confessor of a princess who is niece to the governor.

The trial of the Forli carbonari did not last long. In revenge for their arrival in Rome, which it had been unable to prevent, the extreme party so contrived that the commission which was to try them was composed of the most ambitious prelates. This commission was presided over by the minister of police.

The law against carbonari is clear; those from Forli could cherish no hope; none the less they defended their lives by every possible subterfuge. Not only did their judges condemn them to death, but several declared for atrocious tortures, that their hands should be cut off, and such like. The minister of police, whose fortune was made (for no one leaves that position except to take a red hat), had no use for cut-off hands: when he referred the sentence to the Pope he had the punishment of all the condemned men commuted to several years'

imprisonment. Pietro Missirilli alone was excepted. The minister regarded that young man as a dangerous fanatic, and besides he had already been condemned to death as guilty of the murder of the two carabineers already mentioned. Vanina knew about the sentence and its commutation a few minutes after the minister had returned from his audience of the Pope.

Next day Monsignore Catanzara returned to his palace about midnight and found no sign of his valet in his room; the minister, astonished, rang several times; at last an old, imbecile servant appeared: the minister, out of all patience, decided to undress unaided. He locked his door; it was very warm; he took his gown and threw it in a heap on a chair. The gown, thrown too hard, went over the chair and struck the muslin curtain at the window, and showed the form of a man. The minister quickly rushed to his bed and seized a pistol. As he was returning to the window a very young man, in his livery, came towards him pistol in hand. At this sight the minister raised his pistol and took aim; he was about to fire; the young man said to him, laughing:

"What, Monsignore, do you not recognize Vanina Vanini?"

"What is the meaning of this unseemly pleasantry?" the Minister retorted angrily.

"Let us discuss things coolly," said the young woman. "To begin with, your pistol is not loaded."

The Minister, astonished, satisfied himself that such was the case; after which he drew a dagger from his vest-pocket.[1]

[1] A Roman prelate would no doubt not be fit to command an army corps bravely, as was more than once done by a general of division who was minister of police at Paris at the time of Mallet's attempt; but he never would have let himself be held up in his own house so easily. He would have been too much afraid of being quizzed by his colleagues. A Roman who knows that he is hated does not go about without being well armed.

Vanina said to him, with a charming little air of authority:

"Let us be seated, Monsignore."

And she calmly took her place on a sofa.

"Are you alone, though?" the Minister said.

"Absolutely alone, I swear!" exclaimed Vanina.

The Minister was careful to verify this: he went round the room and looked everywhere; after which he sat down on a chair three paces from Vanina.

"What interest should I have," said Vanina in a gentle and reasonable tone, "in attempting the life of a moderate man, who would probably be succeeded by some weak, hot-headed person that would be capable of undoing himself and others besides."

"What do you want, pray, madam?" the minister said somewhat testily. "This scene is not to my taste, and must cease."

"What I am about to add," Vanina replied haughtily, suddenly forgetting her gracious air, "concerns you more than me. There is a desire that the life of the carbonaro Missirilli should be spared: if he is executed, you will not survive him a week. I have no interest in all this; the folly which you deplore I did to amuse myself in the first place, and next, to oblige a lady who is one of my friends. I wished," Vanina continued, resuming her affability, "I wished to render a service to an accomplished man, who soon will be my uncle, and, from all appearance, should carry the fortunes of his house to a great pitch."

The minister cast aside his vexed air: Vanina's beauty no doubt contributed to this rapid change. Monsignore Catanzara's taste for pretty women was well known in

The writer has not thought it necessary to justify some other little differences between the ways of doing and speaking at Paris and those at Rome. So far from toning down these differences, he has thought it right to state them boldly. The Romans whom he describes have not the honour of being Frenchmen.

Rome, and in her disguise of a footman of the house of Savelli, with well-fitting silk stockings, a red vest, her little sky-blue coat laced with silver, and the pistol in her hand, Vanina was ravishing.

"My future niece," said the minister, almost laughing, "you are committing a great folly, and it will not be your last."

"I hope that so discreet a person as you will keep my secret, especially from Don Livio; and, to make sure of your promise, my dear uncle, if you grant me the life of my friend's protégé, I'll give you a kiss."

Thus continuing the conversation in that half-jocular tone in which Roman ladies know how to discuss the most important affairs, Vanina contrived to give this interview, which she had begun pistol in hand, the air of a visit paid by the young princess Savelli to her uncle the governor of Rome.

Soon Monsignore Catanzara, although rejecting with scorn the notion of being influenced by fear, went so far as to explain to his niece all the difficulties that he would encounter in saving Missirilli's life. As he discussed them, the minister walked up and down the room with Vanina; he took up a carafe of lemonade that was on the chimney-piece, and poured some into a crystal glass. When he was on the point of putting it to his lips, Vanina secured it, and, after holding it some time, let it fall into the garden, as if by carelessness. A moment later, the minister took a chocolate pastille out of a sweetmeat-box. Vanina snatched it from him, and said, laughing as she did so:

"Do take care; everything in the house is poisoned, for they intended your death. It is I who have obtained the respite of my future uncle, so as not to enter the family of Savelli absolutely empty-handed."

Monsignore Catanzara, greatly astonished, thanked his niece, and gave her great hopes of Missirilli's life.

"Our bargain is settled," exclaimed Vanina, "and in

proof of it, here is your reward," she said, embracing him.

The minister took his reward.

"I must own, my dear Vanina," he added, "that I am not fond of blood. Besides, I am still young, though I perhaps look very old to you; and I may live to see the day when blood shed now will leave a stain."

Two o'clock was striking when Monsignore Catanzara escorted Vanina to the private gate of his garden.

The day after next, when the minister appeared before the Pope, not a little anxious about the course that he had to pursue, His Holiness said to him:

"Before we go any further, I have a favour to ask you. There is one of those carbonari from Forli, who is still under sentence of death; the thought keeps me from sleeping: the man must be saved."

The minister, seeing that the Pope had made up his mind, made many objections, and ended by writing a decree, or *motu proprio*, which the Pope signed, contrary to custom.

It had occurred to Vanina that she might perhaps obtain her lover's pardon, but that they would try to poison him. The previous evening, Missirilli had received some small parcels of ship-biscuit from Abbate Cari, her confessor, with a warning not to touch the food provided by the State.

Vanina, having afterwards learned that the Forli carbonari were to be transferred to the castle of San Leo, wished to try to see Missirilli at Città-Castellana on his way; she arrived in that town twenty-four hours in advance of the prisoners; there she found Abbate Cari, who had preceded her by some days. He had got the jailor's leave for Missirilli to hear Mass at midnight in the prison chapel. He had obtained even more: if Missirilli would allow his arms and legs to be fastened with a chain, the jailor would withdraw to the door of the chapel, so that

he could always see the prisoner, for whom he was responsible, but could not hear what he said.

The day which was to decide Vanina's destiny dawned at last. Early in the morning she shut herself up in the prison chapel. Who could tell the thoughts which agitated her during that long day? Did Missirilli love her sufficiently to pardon her? She had denounced his lodge, but she had saved his life. When reason regained command of that tortured soul, Vanina hoped that he would consent to leave Italy in her company; if she had sinned, it was through excess of love. As four o'clock struck, she heard the tread of the carabineers' horses on the pavement in the distance. Each tread seemed to ring in her heart. Soon she made out the rumbling of the carts which conveyed the prisoners. They halted in the little square in front of the prison; she saw two carabineers lift out Missirilli, who was alone on a cart and so heavily loaded with irons that he could not move. "At least he is alive," she said to herself with tears in her eyes; "they have not poisoned him." The evening was cruel; the altar-lamp, which was hung high up, and which the jailor stinted of oil, was the only light in the gloomy chapel. Vanina's eyes wandered over the tombs of some great lords of the Middle Ages who had died in the neighbouring prison. Their statues looked ferocious.

All sounds had long ago ceased; Vanina was absorbed in her black thoughts. Shortly after midnight struck, she thought she heard a slight noise like the flutter of a bat. She tried to walk, and fell half-fainting on the altar-rail. At the same instant, two phantoms stood beside her, without her having heard them come. They were the jailor and Missirilli, so loaded with chains that he was almost swathed in them. The jailor opened a lantern, which he placed on the altar-rail, beside Vanina, in such a position that he could see his prisoner clearly. Then he withdrew into the background, near the door. Scarcely had the jailor removed, when Vanina flung

herself on Missirilli's neck. As she clasped him in her arms, she felt nothing but his cold, sharp chains. "Who put these chains on him?" she thought. She felt no pleasure in embracing her lover. To this pain succeeded another more piercing: she believed, for a moment, that Missirilli knew of her crime, his reception of her was so chilly.

"Dear friend," he said to her at last, "I regret the love which you have conceived for me; though I search, I cannot discover the merit that might have inspired it. Let us return, I entreat you, to more Christian feelings, let us forget the illusions which once led us astray; I cannot be yours. The continual misfortune that has dogged my enterprises proceeds, perhaps, from the state of mortal sin in which I have always lived. Even listening to the counsels of human prudence, why was I not arrested with my friends on that fatal night at Forli? Why was I not found at my post at the moment of danger? Why was it that my absence could authorize the most cruel suspicions?—Because I had another passion than the liberation of Italy."

Vanina could not recover from the surprise that she felt at the change in Missirilli. Though he did not appear to have grown thinner, he looked like thirty. Vanina attributed this change to the bad treatment that he had suffered in prison; she burst into tears.

"Ah," she said to him, "the jailors promised so faithfully that they would treat you kindly!"

The fact was that, at the approach of death, all the religious principles that were consistent with his passion for the liberation of Italy had revived in the young carbonaro's heart. Little by little Vanina perceived that the astonishing change which she noticed in her lover was entirely moral, and in no wise the result of physical ill-treatment. Her grief, which she had thought at its height, was augmented by this discovery.

Missirilli ceased speaking; Vanina seemed on the point

of being suffocated by her sobs. He added, with some emotion:

"If I loved anything on earth, it would be you, Vanina; but thanks to God I have only one object left me in life; I will die in prison, or in the endeavour to restore liberty to Italy."

There was another silence; evidently Vanina was unable to speak: she tried to do so, in vain. Missirilli added:

"Duty is cruel, my friend; but, if there were no pain in accomplishing it, where would heroism be? Give me your word that you will not try to see me again."

As well as his close-bound chain allowed him, he made a little motion with his wrist and stretched out his fingers to Vanina.

"If you will let a man who was dear to you advise you, be sensible and marry the deserving man whom your father intends for you. Do not make any awkward confidence to him; but on the other hand do not ever try to see me again; let us be strangers to each other in future. You have advanced a considerable sum for the service of your country; if ever it is delivered from its tyrants, that sum will be repaid to you in national funds."

Vanina was overwhelmed. While he spoke to her, Pietro's eye had never once flashed, except when he uttered the word "country."

At last pride came to the rescue of the young princess; she had provided herself with diamonds and small files. Without a word of reply, she offered them to Missirilli. "I accept them out of duty," he said, "for I must try to escape; but I will never see you again; I swear it in presence of your new benefits. Adieu, Vanina; promise me that you will never write to me, never try to see me; leave all of me to my country, I am dead to you: farewell."

"No!" Vanina replied furiously, "I wish you to know what I have done, led by the love I had for you."

With that she told him all her proceedings from the moment that Missirilli quitted the castle of San Nicolo to surrender himself to the legate. When the recital was ended, Vanina said:

"All that is nothing; I did more for love of you."

And she told him of her treason.

"Ah, monster!" exclaimed Pietro in a rage, hurling himself upon her, and he tried to fell her with his chains.

He would have succeeded in doing so, but for the jailor, who ran forward at his first cries. He seized Missirilli.

"Here, monster! I won't be indebted to you for anything," said Missirilli to Vanina, flinging the files and diamonds at her as well as his chains permitted; and he hastened away.

Vanina remained utterly crushed. She returned to Rome, and the newspapers announce that she has just married Prince Don Livio Savelli.

THE CHILD WITH THE BREAD SHOES

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

LISTEN to this story which the grandmothers of Germany tell their grandchildren,—Germany, a beautiful country of legends and dreams, where the moonlight, playing on the mists of Old Rhine, creates a thousand fantastic visions.

At the end of the village a poor woman lived alone in a humble cottage: the house was very poor and contained but the barest necessities in the way of furniture.

An old bed with twisted columns whence hung serge curtains yellow with age; a bread-bin; a walnut chest, polished till it shone, but the numerous worm-eaten holes of which were stopped with wax, indicated a long period of service; an armchair, covered with tapestry from which the colours had faded and which had been worn thin by the shaking head of the old grandmother; a spinning-wheel polished with use: that was all.

We were about to forget a child's cradle, quite new, very cosily padded and covered with a pretty flowered counterpane stitched by an indefatigable needle, that of a mother ornamenting the crib of her little Jesus.

All the wealth in the little house was centred there.

The child of a burgomaster or of an aulic councillor could not have been more softly couched. Sacred prodigality, sweet folly of the mother who deprives herself of everything to provide a little luxury, in the midst of her poverty, for her dear nursling!

The cradle gave a festal air to the poor hovel; nature,

which is compassionate to the unfortunate, made the bareness of this white-washed cottage gay with tufts of houseleek and velvet moss. Kind plants, full of pity, although they looked like parasites, filled up the holes in the roof and made it as dazzling as a bride's jewels, and prevented the rain from falling on the cradle; the pigeons alighted on the window and cooed until the child fell asleep.

A little bird, to which young Hans had given a crumb of bread in the winter, when the snow made the ground white, had, when spring came, let a grain fall from his beak at the foot of the wall, and thence had sprung a beautiful bindweed which, clinging to the stones with its green claws, had entered the room by a broken window-pane, and crowned the child's cradle with its cluster, so that in the morning Hans's blue eyes and the blue bells of the bindweed woke up at the same time, and looked at each other with an understanding air.

This home, then, was poor but not gloomy.

Hans's mother, whose husband had died far away at the war, lived as best she could on vegetables from the garden, and the product of her spinning-wheel: very little, it is true, but Hans wanted for nothing and that was enough.

Hans's mother was a truly pious and believing woman. She prayed, worked and practised virtue; but she had one fault: she looked upon herself with too much complacence and prided herself too much on her son.

It sometimes happens that mothers, seeing these beautiful rosy children, with dimpled hands, white skin and pink heels, think that they belong to them for ever.

But God gives nothing; he only lends, and, like a forgotten creditor, he sometimes comes to demand his own again all of a sudden.

Because this fresh bud had sprung from her stem, Hans's mother believed that she had made him to be born: and God, who, from within his Paradise with its

azure vaults starred with gold, watches everything that happens on earth, and hears from the ends of the infinite the sound that the blade of grass makes as it grows, was not pleased to see this.

He also saw that Hans was greedy and that his mother was too indulgent to this greediness; the naughty child often cried when he had, after grapes or an apple, to eat bread, object of envy to so many unfortunates, and his mother let him throw away the piece of bread he had commenced, or else finished it herself.

Now it happened that Hans fell ill: fever burned him, his breath whistled in his choking throat; he had croup, a terrible illness that has made the eyes of many mothers and fathers red.

At the sight the poor woman was filled with horrible anguish.

You have doubtless seen in some church the image of Our Lady, clothed in mourning and standing under the Cross, with her breast open and her bleeding heart, where lie plunged seven swords of silver, three on one side, four on the other. That means that there is no agony more terrible than that of a mother who sees her child dying.

And yet the Holy Virgin believed in the divinity of Jesus and knew that her son would come to life again.

Now Hans's mother had not that hope.

During the last days of Hans's illness his mother, even while watching him, continued to spin mechanically and the whirring of the wheel mingled with the rattle in the throat of the dying child.

If some rich people find it strange that a mother can spin by the bed-side of a dying child, it is because they do not understand what tortures poverty contains for the soul; alas! it does not only break the body, it also breaks the heart.

What she was spinning thus, was the thread for her little Hans's shroud; she did not wish that any cloth

that had been used should cover that dear body, and, as she had no money, she made her spinning-wheel hum with a mournful activity; but she did not pass the thread through her lips as was her custom: enough tears fell from her eyes to moisten it.

At the end of the sixth day, Hans expired. Whether from chance or from sympathy, the cluster of bindweed that caressed his cradle faded, dried up and let its last curled-up flower fall on the bed.

When the mother was quite convinced that the breath had for ever flown from his lips, on which the violets of death had replaced the roses of life, she covered the too dear head with the edge of the sheet, took her bundle of thread under her arm, and made her way towards the weaver's house.

"Weaver," she said to him, "here is some very fine thread, very regular and without knots; the spider does not spin any finer between the joists of the ceiling; let your shuttle come and go; from this thread I must have an ell of cloth as soft as the cloth of Friesland or Holland."

The weaver took the skein, set the warp, and the busy shuttle, drawing the thread after it, began to run hither and thither.

The card strengthened the woof and the thread continued to grow evenly, and without breaking, on the loom; it was as fine as the shift of an archduchess or the linen with which the priest dries the communion-cup at the altar.

When all the thread was used, the weaver gave the cloth to the poor mother, and, as he had understood everything from the settled look of despair on the unhappy woman's face, he said to her:

"The emperor's son, who died last year while still an infant, was not wrapped in a finer or softer shroud in his little ebony coffin with silver nails."

Having folded the cloth, the mother drew from her wasted finger a thin gold ring, all worn with use.

"Good weaver," she said, "take this ring, my wedding-ring, the only gold I ever possessed."

The kind weaver-man did not wish to take it; but she said to him:

"Where I am going I shall have no need of a ring; for I feel my Hans's small arms pulling me into the ground."

Then she went to the carpenter and said to him:

"Master, get me some oak from the heart of the tree, which will not rot and which the worms will not be able to eat; cut from it five boards and two little boards and make a coffin to these measurements."

The carpenter took his saw and plane, trimmed the planks, and struck the nails as lightly as possible with his hammer, so as not to let the iron points enter farther into the poor woman's heart than into the wood.

When the work was finished, it was so carefully and so well done that it might have been taken for a box to put jewels and laces in.

"Carpenter, as you have made so beautiful a coffin for my little Hans, I give you my house at the end of the village, and the little garden behind it, and the well with the vineyard.—You shall not wait long."

With the shroud and the coffin, which she held under her arm, it was so small, she went through the village streets, and the children, who do not know what death is, said:

"Look at Hans's mother taking him a beautiful box of toys from Nuremberg; it must be a town with its painted and varnished wooden houses, its steeple covered with tin-foil, its belfry and its tower with battlements, and its trees in the promenades, all curly and green; or else a beautiful violin with its sculptured pegs at the neck and its horsehair bow.—Oh, why have we not a box like it!"

And the mothers, growing pale, kissed them and told them to be quiet:

"Silly children that you are, you must not say that; do not wish for the box of toys, or the violin-case that one carries with tears under one's arm: you will have it soon enough, poor little ones!"

When Hans's mother got home, she took the dainty, still pretty, corpse of her son and began to make his last toilet—it must be made carefully, for it has to last for eternity.

She clothed him in his Sunday clothes, his silk dress and fur pelisse, so that he should not be cold in the damp place to which he was going. Beside him she put the doll with the enamel eyes, the doll he loved so much that he always took it to bed with him.

But, just as she was turning down the shroud on the body which she had kissed for the last time a thousand times, she saw that she had forgotten to place his pretty little red slippers on the child's feet.

She looked for them in the room, for it hurt her to see the little feet bare that used to be so warm and pink, and were now so cold and white; but during her absence the rats had found the shoes under the bed, and for want of better food had nibbled them, gnawed at them, and cut holes in the leather.

It was a great grief to the poor mother that Hans should go away into the other world with bare feet; when the heart is all one wound, it only needs a touch to make it bleed.

She cried to see the slippers: from that inflamed, worn-out eye a tear could still gush.

How could she get shoes for Hans, when she had already given her ring and her house? That was the thought that troubled her. By dint of thinking she had an idea.

In the bread-bin there was still a whole loaf of bread, as, for a long time, the unhappy woman, kept alive by her sorrow, had been eating nothing.

She broke the loaf, remembering that, in the past,

she had often made with the soft parts pigeons, geese, chickens, wooden shoes, boats, and other boys' things to amuse Hans.

Placing the bread in the hollow of her hand, and kneading it with her thumb while she moistened it with her tears, she made a little pair of bread shoes, with which she covered the cold, bluish feet of the dead child, and, her heart consoled, she turned down the shroud and closed the coffin.—While she was kneading the bread, a poor man had come to the door and timidly asked for some bread; but she had signed to him with her hand to go away.

The grave-digger came to take away the box, and buried it in a corner of the cemetery under a clump of white rose-bushes: the air was warm, it was not raining and the ground was not wet; this was a comfort to the mother, who thought that her poor little Hans would not pass the first night in his tomb too uncomfortably.

When she returned home to her solitary house, she placed Hans's cradle beside her bed, lay down and fell asleep.

Overtaxed nature succumbed.

As she slept, she had a dream or, at least, she believed it was a dream.

Hans appeared to her, clothed, as he was in his coffin, in his Sunday dress and his pelisse lined with swans'-down, in his hand his doll with the enamel eyes and on his feet his bread shoes.

He seemed to be sad.

He had not the halo that death ought to give to the little innocents; for, if a child is placed in the ground, it comes out an angel.

The roses of Paradise were not flourishing on his pale cheeks, coloured white by death; tears fell from his blond eyelashes, and great sighs swelled his little breast.

The vision disappeared, and the mother awoke,

bathed in perspiration, delighted at having seen her child, terrified at having seen him so sad; but she reassured herself by saying, "Poor Hans! even in Paradise he cannot forget me."

The following night, the apparition was repeated: Hans was still more sad and more pale.

His mother, stretching her arms out to him, said:

"Dear child, take comfort, and do not weary in Heaven; I shall soon rejoin you."

The third night, Hans came again; he moaned and cried more than at the other times, and he disappeared with his little hands joined; he no longer had his doll, but he still had his bread shoes.

His mother, being uneasy, went to consult a venerable priest, who said to her:

"I will watch beside you to-night, and I will question the little ghost; he will answer me; I know what words to say to innocent or guilty spirits."

Hans appeared at the usual hour, and the priest summoned him, in the consecrated words, to tell him what troubled him in the other world.

"It is the bread shoes which torment me, and hinder me from mounting the diamond staircase of Paradise; they are heavier on my feet than postilion's boots and I cannot get past the first two or three steps, and that troubles me greatly, for I see above a cloud of beautiful cherubim with rosy wings who are calling to me to play with them and are showing me toys of silver and gold."

Having said these words, he disappeared.

The good priest, to whom Hans's mother had made her confession, said to her:

"You have committed a grave fault, you have profaned the daily bread, the sacred bread, our good God's bread, the bread that Jesus Christ, at his last repast, chose to represent his body, and, after having refused a slice of it to the poor man who came to your door, you kneaded from it slippers for your Hans.

"You must open the coffin, take the bread shoes off the child's feet, and burn them in the all-purifying fire."

Accompanied by the grave-digger and the mother, the priest proceeded to the cemetery: with four blows of the spade the coffin was laid bare, and was opened.

Hans was lying inside, just as his mother had laid him there, but his face bore an expression of pain.

The holy priest gently removed the bread shoes from the dead child's feet and burned them himself at the flames of a candle, reciting a prayer the while.

When night came, Hans appeared to his mother one last time, but he was gay, rosy and happy, and had with him two little cherubim with whom he had already made friends; he had wings of light and a fillet of diamonds.

"Oh, mother, what joy, what happiness, and oh, how beautiful are the gardens of Paradise! We play there all the time and our good God never scolds."

Next day, the mother saw her son again, not on earth, but in heaven; for she died during the day, her brow pressed against the empty cradle.

THE REVEREND FATHER GAUCHER'S ELIXIR

ALPHONSE DAUDET

"DRINK this, neighbour, and tell me what you think of it."

And drop by drop, with the scrupulous care of a lapidary counting pearls, the *curé* of Graveson poured me out two fingers of a golden-green liquor, warm, shimmering, exquisite.... It warmed my stomach like sunshine.

"That is Father Gaucher's elixir, the pride and the health of our Provence," the good man informed me triumphantly. "It is made at the Premonstratensian convent, a couple of leagues from your mill.... Isn't it worth all their Chartreuses?... And if you only knew how amusing the story of this elixir is! Just listen...."

Thereupon quite innocently, thinking no evil, in the presbytery dining-room so simple and quiet with its little pictures of the Stations of the Cross and its pretty white starched curtains like surplices, the abbé began to tell me a tale just a little sceptical and irreverent, after the manner of a story from Erasmus or D'Assoucy.

"Twenty years ago the Premonstratensians, or rather the White Fathers, as our Provençals call them, had fallen into great poverty. If you had seen their house in those days, it would have made your heart ache.

"The great wall and St. Pachomius' tower were

falling into pieces. Around the weed-grown cloisters the columns were splitting, the stone saints were crumbling in their niches. Not a window was whole, not a door held fast. In the garths and chapels the Rhone wind blew as it does in the Camargue, extinguishing the candles, breaking the lead of the windows, and driving the holy water out of the stoups. But saddest of all was the convent steeple as silent as a deserted dove-cote, and the fathers, for want of means to buy themselves a bell, forced to ring to matins with clappers of almond-wood! . . .

"Poor White Fathers! I can see them yet, at a Corpus Christi procession, filing sadly past in their patched mantles, pale, thin from their diet of pumpkins and melons, and behind them his lordship the abbot, who hung down his head as he went, ashamed at letting the sun see his crosier with the gilding worn off and his white woollen mitre all moth-eaten. The ladies of the confraternity wept in their ranks for pity at the sight, and the big banner-carriers grinned and whispered to each other, as they pointed at the poor monks:

"'Starlings go thin when they go in a flock!'

"The fact is that the unfortunate White Fathers were themselves reduced to debating whether they would not be better to take their flight across the world and seek fresh pasture each one where he could.

"So then, one day when this grave question was being discussed in the chapter, a message was brought to the prior that Brother Gaucher asked to be heard before the council. . . . You must understand that this Brother Gaucher was the convent cowherd; that is to say, he spent his days in wandering from arch to arch of the cloisters, driving two scraggy cows, which sought for grass in the crevices of the pavement. Brought up until his twelfth year by an old half-witted woman in Les Baux, called Auntie Bégon, and then taken in by the monks, the unfortunate cowherd had never been

able to learn anything except to drive his beasts and to repeat his paternoster, and even that he said in Provençal; for he had a thick skull, and his wits were about as sharp as a leaden dagger. A fervent Christian, for all that, though somewhat visionary, quite comfortable in his sackcloth, and disciplining himself with strong conviction and such arms! . . .

"When they saw him enter the chapter-house, simple and clownish, and salute the assembly with a scrape, prior, canons, treasurer, and every one burst out laughing. That was always the effect produced everywhere that his honest, grizzled face appeared, with its goatee and its somewhat vacuous eyes; so Brother Gaucher was not put about.

"'Your Reverences,' he said in a good-natured tone, twisting at his olive-stone beads, 'it's a true saying that empty barrels make the most sound. What do you think? By putting my poor brains to steep, though they're soft enough already, I do believe I've found the way to get us all out of our difficulties.

"'It's this way. You know Auntie Bégon, the good woman who took care of me when I was little—God rest her soul, the old sinner! She used to sing some queer songs when she had drink—Well, what I want to tell you, my reverend fathers, is that when Auntie Bégon was alive she knew the herbs that grow in the mountains as well and better than any old hag in Corsica. And, by the same token, in her latter days she compounded an incomparable elixir by blending five or six sorts of simples, which we used to go and gather together in the Alpilles. That's many a year ago; but I think that with the aid of Saint Augustine, and the permission of our father abbot, I might—if I search carefully—recall the composition of that mysterious elixir. Then we should only have to put it into bottles and sell it a little dear, and the community would be able to get rich at its ease, like our brethren at La Trappe and the Grande. . . .'

"He had not time to finish. The prior got up and fell on his neck. The canons took him by the hands. The treasurer, even more deeply moved than any of the others, respectfully kissed the frayed hem of his cowl.... Then each returned to his stall to deliberate; and in solemn assembly the chapter decided to entrust the cows to Brother Thrasybulus, in order that Brother Gaucher might devote himself entirely to the preparation of his elixir.

"How did the good brother manage to recall Auntie Bégon's recipe? What efforts, what vigils did it cost him? History does not relate. But this much is certain, at the end of six months the White Fathers' elixir was very popular already. In all the Comtat, in all the Arles district not a *mas*, not a farm-house but had at the backdoor of its spence, among the bottles of wine syrup and jars of *olives picholines*, a little brown stone flagon sealed with the arms of Provence, with a monk in ecstasy on a silver label. Thanks to the vogue of its elixir the house of the Premonstratensians got rich very rapidly. St. Pachomius' tower was rebuilt. The prior got a new mitre, the church grand new painted windows; and in the fine tracery of the steeple a whole flight of bells, big and little, alighted one fine Easter morning, chiming and pealing in full swing.

"As for Brother Gaucher, the poor lay brother whose rusticities used to amuse the chapter so, he was never mentioned now in the convent. They only knew the Reverend Father Gaucher, a man of brains and ability, who lived quite isolated from the petty, multifarious occupations of the cloister, and shut himself up all day in his distillery, while thirty monks scoured the mountains in search of his fragrant herbs.... This distillery, to which no one, not even the prior, had the right of entry, was an old abandoned chapel at the bottom of the canons' garden. The good fathers' simplicity had made

it into a very mysterious and formidable place; and any bold and inquisitive monk who managed to reach the rose-window above the door by scrambling up the climbing vines promptly tumbled down, terrified at his peep of Father Gaucher with his necromancer's beard, stooping over his furnaces, hydrometer in hand; and all around him red stone retorts, gigantic alembics, glass worms, a regular weird litter that glowed as if enchanted in the red gleam of the windows....

"At close of day, when the last stroke of the Angelus sounded, the door of this place of mystery was opened discreetly, and his Reverence betook himself to the church for the evening office. You should have seen the reception that he got as he traversed the monastery! The brethren lined up as he passed. They said:

"'Hush!... He has the secret!...'

"The treasurer walked behind him and spoke to him, bowing deferentially.... Amid these adulations the Father went his way, wiping his brow, his three-cornered hat with its broad brim on the back of his head like an aureole, looking complacently about him at the wide courts planted with orange-trees, the blue roofs where new vanes were turning, and in the dazzling white cloister, amid the neat flower columns, the canons all newly rigged out, walking two and two with contented faces.

"'They owe all that to me!' his Reverence said inwardly; and, as often as he did so, the thought made his pride rise in gusts.

"The poor man was heavily punished for it. You'll hear how that happened....

"You must understand that one evening, whilst the office was being sung, he arrived at the church in an extraordinary state of agitation: red, breathless, his cowl awry, and so upset that in taking holy water he dipped his sleeves into it up to the elbows. At first

they thought that it was excitement at being late; but when they saw him make profound reverences to the organ and the galleries instead of saluting the high altar, rush across the church like a whirlwind, wander about in the choir for five minutes in search of his stall, then, once he was seated, sway right and left, smiling benignly, a murmur of astonishment ran through the nave and aisles. They chuckled to one another behind their breviaries:

"'Whatever is the matter with our Father Gaucher?... Whatever is the matter with our Father Gaucher?'

"Twice the prior impatiently let his crosier fall on the pavement to command silence.... Down at the end of the choir the psalms still went on; but the responses lacked animation....

"Suddenly, in the middle of the *Ave verum*, lo and behold, Father Gaucher flung himself back in his stall, and sang out at the top of his voice:

"'In Paris there dwells a White Father,
Patatin, patatan, tarabin, taraban...'

"General consternation. Every one rose. There were cries of:

"'Take him away!... He's possessed!'

"The canons crossed themselves. His Lordship flourished his crosier.... But Father Gaucher saw nothing, heard nothing; and two sturdy monks had to drag him out by the side-door of the choir, struggling like a demoniac and going on worse than ever with his 'patatins' and 'tarabans.'

"Next morning, at daybreak, the unfortunate man was on his knees in the prior's oratory, owning his fault with a torrent of tears.

"'It was the elixir, my lord; it was the elixir that overcame me,' he said, beating on his breast.

"And seeing him so conscience-smitten, so penitent, the good prior himself was moved.

"'Come, come, Father Gaucher, set your mind at rest; it will all pass away like dew in the sun.... After all, the scandal has not been so great as you think. To be sure, there was a song that was a little... hem! hem!... Yet let us hope that the novices would not pick it up.... But now, let us see; tell me frankly how it all happened.... It was when you were trying the elixir, was it not? Perhaps your hand was too heavy?... Yes, yes, I understand.... It is like brother Schwartz, the inventor of gunpowder: you have been the victim of your invention. But tell me, my good friend, is it absolutely necessary for you to try this terrible elixir on yourself?'

"'Unfortunately it is, my lord! The gauge gives me the strength and the degree of alcohol, it is true; but for the fineness, the velvetiness, I can't very well trust anything but my tongue!...'

"'Ah, to be sure!... But listen for another moment to what I am going to say to you.... When you are compelled to taste the elixir thus, does it seem good? Do you derive any pleasure from it?'

"'Alas, yes, my lord!' said the unfortunate father, blushing to the roots of his hair. 'These last two evenings I have found such a bouquet in it, such an aroma!... Surely it must be the Devil that has played me this sorry trick.... And so I have quite decided to use nothing but the gauge in future. If the liquor is not fine enough, if it does not pearl enough, so much the worse....'

"'For any sake don't do that,' the prior interrupted excitedly. 'We must not run the risk of making our customers dissatisfied.... All you have to do, now that you are forewarned, is to be on your guard.... Let us see, how much do you require to ascertain?... Fifteen or twenty drops, eh?... Let's say twenty drops. ... The Devil will be smart indeed if he catches you with twenty drops.... In any case, to prevent acci-

dents, I'll dispense you from coming to church in future. You will say the evening office in the distillery.... And, meanwhile, go in peace, reverend father, and, above all things, count your drops carefully.'

"Alas, his poor reverence had much need to count his drops!... The Devil had hold of him, and never afterwards let him go.

"The distillery heard some strange offices!

"So long as it was day, all went well. The father was tolerably calm: he prepared his chafing-dishes and alembics, sorted his herbs carefully, all Provence herbs, fine, grey, serrated, hot with perfume and sunshine.... But in the evening, when the simples were infused and the elixir was cooling in great copper basins, the poor man's martyrdom began.

"'Seventeen... eighteen... nineteen... twenty!...'

"The drops fell from the stirring-rod into the silver-gilt goblet. The father swallowed the twenty at a gulp, almost without pleasure. What he longed for was the twenty-first. Oh, that twenty-first drop!... Then, to escape temptation, he went and knelt down at the farthest end of the laboratory, and buried himself in his paternosters. But from the still-warm liquor there rose a faint steam charged with aromas, which came stealing about him and sent him back willy-nilly to his basins.... The liquor was a lovely golden green.... Leaning over it with open nostrils, the father stirred it gently with his stirring-rod, and in the little sparkling bubbles that the emerald wave carried round he seemed to see Auntie Bégon's eyes laughing and twinkling as they looked at him....

"'Here goes! Another drop!'

"And with one drop and another the unfortunate at last had his goblet full to the brim. Then, completely vanquished, he sank down in a great arm-chair, and lolling at ease, his eyes half shut, tasted his sin sip

by sip, saying softly to himself with a delicious remorse:

"'Ah! I'm damning myself . . . damning myself. . . .'

"The most terrible thing was that at the bottom of this diabolical elixir he rediscovered by some black art or other all Auntie Bégon's naughty songs: 'There are three little gossips, who talk of making a banquet' . . . or: 'Master Andrew's little shepherdess goes off to the wood by her little self,' and always the famous one about the White Fathers: 'Patatin, patatan.'

"Imagine his confusion next day when his cell-mates said to him slyly:

"'Eh, eh, Father Gaucher, you had a bee in your bonnet last night, when you went to bed!'

"Then it was tears, despair and fasting, sackcloth and discipline. But nothing could avail against the demon of the elixir, and every evening at the same hour his possession began anew.

"All this time orders were pouring into the abbey in excess of expectation. They came from Nîmes, from Aix, from Avignon, from Marseilles. . . . Every day the convent became more like a factory. There were packing brothers, labelling brothers, others for the accounts, others for the carting; the service of God may have lost a few tolls of the bells now and again by it; but I can assure you that the poor folk of the district lost nothing. . . .

"Well, then, one fine Sunday morning, whilst the treasurer was reading in full chapter his stock-sheet at the end of the year, and the good canons were listening to him with sparkling eyes and smiles on their lips, who should burst into the middle of the meeting but Father Gaucher, shouting out:

"'That's an end of it! . . . I can't stand it any longer! . . . Give me my cows again!'

"'But what is it, Father Gaucher?' asked the prior, who had his own suspicions of what it was.

"'What is it, my lord?... I'm on a fair way of preparing myself a fine eternity of flames and pitch-forks.... I drink, and drink, like a lost soul; that's what it is!...'

"'But I told you to count your drops.'

"'Ah, so you did! To count my drops! But I would need to count by goblets now.... Yes, your Reverences, that's what I've come to. Three bottles an evening!... You know quite well that can't go on for ever.... So, get whom you like to make the elixir.... God's fire burn me, if I take anything more to do with it!'

"There was no more laughing for the chapter.

"'But, wretched man, you'll ruin us!' cried the treasurer, brandishing his ledger.

"'Would you rather I damned myself?'

"Thereupon the prior stood up.

"'Reverend sirs,' he said, stretching out his fine white hand, on which the pastoral ring glistened, 'it can all be arranged.... It's at night, is it not, my dear son, that the demon assails you?...'

"'Yes, Sir Prior, regularly every evening.... When I see the night coming on, I get all in a sweat, saving your Reverence's presence, like Capitou's ass, when he saw them come with the pack-saddle.'

"'Well, then, keep your mind easy.... In future, every evening, during the office, we'll recite on your behalf the Prayer of Saint Augustine, to which plenary indulgence is attached.... With that, you are safe, whatever happens.... It is absolution at the very moment of sin.'

"'O that is good, thank you, Sir Prior.'

"And, without asking anything more, Father Gaucher returned to his alembics as light as a lark.

"And in fact, from that moment, every evening, at the end of compline, the officiant never failed to say:

"'Let us pray for our poor Father Gaucher, who is sacrificing his soul in the interests of the community. *Oremus, Domine. . . .*'

"And, while the prayer ran along all those white cowls prostrated in the shadow of the naves, like a little breeze over snow, away at the other end of the convent, behind the lighted windows of the distillery, Father Gaucher might be heard chanting open-throated:

> "'In Paris there dwells a White Father,
> Patatin, patatan, tarabin, taraban;
> In Paris there dwells a White Father
> Who sets all the little nuns dancing,
> Trip, trip, trip, trip in a garden;
> Who sets all the . . .'"

At this point the good *curé* stopped short in horror. "Mercy on us! If my parishioners heard me!"

THE LEGEND OF SAINT JULIAN HOSPITATOR

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

I

JULIAN'S father and mother lived in a castle in the midst of woods on the slope of a hill.

Its four corner-towers had pointed roofs covered with scales of lead, and the base of the walls rested on masses of rock which went down abruptly right to the bottom of the moat.

The pavements of the court were as clean as the flagged floor of a church. Long gutters, shaped like dragons with down-drooped jaws, vomited the rain-water into the cistern; and on the window-ledges at every storey, in a pot of painted earthenware, a plant of basil or heliotrope opened to the sun.

A second line of defence, formed of stakes, enclosed first an orchard of fruit-trees, then a parterre, where the combinations of the flowers formed patterns, and next a trellis with bowers in which to take the air, and a mall which served to amuse the pages. On the other side were the kennel, the stables, the bakery, the wine-press and the barns. A meadow of green grass extended all around, itself enclosed by a strong hedge of thorns.

They had lived in peace so long that the portcullis was never let down; the moats were full of water; the swallows made their nests in the openings of the battlements; and the archer who walked up and down upon

the walls all day long retired into his turret as soon as the sun shone too strongly, and slept there like a monk.

Indoors, the ironwork shone everywhere; tapestries in the rooms gave protection from the cold; and the presses were crammed with linen; the wine-tuns were piled up in the cellars, the oaken coffers groaned with the weight of bags of silver.

In the great hall arms of every age and every nation were to be seen among banners and heads of wild beasts, from the slings of the Amalekites and the javelins of the Garamantes to the scimitars of the Saracens and the chain-coats of the Normans.

The great spit in the kitchen could turn an ox; the chapel was as sumptuous as the oratory of a king. There was even, in a retired corner, a vapour-bath in the Roman fashion; but the good lord of the castle abstained from it, deeming that it was an idolatrous custom.

Always wrapped in a fox pelisse, he walked about his house, did justice among his vassals, and appeased the quarrels of his neighbours. In winter he watched the snow-flakes fall, or had histories read to him. As soon as the good weather came, he went out on his mule along the lanes, amongst the green cornfields, and talked with the rustics, to whom he gave advice. After many adventures, he had taken to wife a damsel of high degree.

She was very fair, somewhat proud and serious. The horns of her head-dress brushed against the lintel of the doors; the train of her cloth gown trailed three paces behind her. Her household was ruled like the interior of a monastery; every morning she gave out their work to her servants, saw to the comfits and unguents, span on her distaff, or embroidered altar-cloths. In answer to her prayers God granted her a son.

Then there were great rejoicings, and a feast which lasted three days and four nights, amid the illumination of torches, to the sound of harps, on floors strawed with

leafage. At it they ate the rarest spices, with fowls as big as sheep; as a diversion, a dwarf came out of a pasty; and when the bowls gave out, for the crowd was ever increasing, they were obliged to drink from the horns and helmets.

The young mother was not present at those festivities. She stayed in her bed and kept quiet. One evening she woke and saw, by a moonbeam that shone in at the window, something like a shadow that moved. It was an ancient in a frock of coarse stuff, with a chaplet at his side, a wallet on his shoulder, with all the appearance of a hermit. He came up to her pillow and said without opening his lips:

"Rejoice, O mother! Thy son will be a saint!"

She was about to cry out; but gliding upon the moon-ray he rose gently into the air, then disappeared. The songs of the banquet sounded more loudly than ever. She heard the voices of angels; and her head sank back upon the pillow, which was surmounted by the bone of a martyr in a frame of carbuncles.

Next day all the servants, when questioned, declared that they had not seen any hermit. Dream or reality, this must have been a communication from Heaven; but she was careful to say nothing about it, lest she should be charged with pride.

The revellers departed at break of day; and Julian's father was outside the postern, where he had been seeing the last of them off, when all at once a mendicant rose up before him in the mist. He was a gipsy with plaited beard, silver rings on both his arms, and sparkling eyeballs. With an inspired air he stammered these inconsequent words:

"Ah! ah! your son!... much blood!... much glory! ... always fortunate! An Emperor's family."

And, stooping to pick up his alms, he disappeared in the grass and vanished.

The good castellan looked right and left and called

his loudest. Not a soul! The wind blew, the morning mists cleared away.

He attributed this vision to lightheadedness from want of sleep. "If I talk about it," he said to himself, "they will laugh at me." However, the splendours destined for his son dazzled him, although the promise of them was by no means clear, and he even doubted whether he had heard it.

The spouses kept their secrets from each other. But both cherished the child with equal love; and, respecting him as one marked out by God, they bestowed an infinity of care upon his person. His cradle was stuffed with the finest down; a lamp in the shape of a dove burned over it continually; three nurses lulled him to rest; and, well wrapped in his swaddling-bands, his face rosy, and his eyes blue, with his brocade cloak and his cap trimmed with pearls, he looked like a little Jesus. His teeth came without his uttering a single moan.

When he was seven, his mother taught him to sing. To make him brave, his father hoisted him on to a great horse. The child smiled with satisfaction, and was not long in learning everything about chargers.

A very learned old monk instructed him in the Holy Scriptures, Arabic cyphering, Latin letters, and the art of drawing dainty pictures on vellum. They worked together away up at the top of a tower, out of the noise.

The lesson finished, they went down to the garden, where, walking about side by side, they studied the flowers.

Sometimes they would see a string of pack-animals making their way along the bottom of the vale conducted by a man on foot in Oriental garb. The castellan, who had recognized him for a merchant, would send a servant to him. The stranger, taking confidence, turned out of his way, and, taken into the parlour, he brought out of his coffers pieces of velvet and silk, jewellery, aromatics, strange things of which the use was unknown; in the end the honest man went away with great gain,

without having suffered any violence. At other times a group of pilgrims would knock at the door. Their wet garments smoked before the fire; and when they were fed they told their travels: the wanderings of barks on the foaming sea, marches on foot through the burning sands, the ferocity of the Paynims, the caverns of Syria, the Cradle and the Sepulchre. Then they gave the young lord cockle-shells from their mantles.

Often the castellan feasted his old companions-in-arms. As they drank, they recalled their wars, the assaults on fortresses with battering of engines and prodigious wounds. Julian, who was listening, uttered shouts at what he heard; thereupon his father had no doubt that he would some day be a conqueror. But in the evening, when the angelus sounded, as he passed between the bowing poor, he put his hand in his purse with such modesty and such a noble air that his mother was certain he would be an archbishop in course of time.

His place in chapel was beside his parents; and however long the offices might be he remained on his knees at his faldstool, his bonnet on the ground and his hands clasped.

One day during Mass, on raising his head, he noticed a little white mouse which came out of a hole in the wall. It ran on to the first step of the altar, and, after two or three turns to right and left, made off the same way. Next Sunday the thought that he might see it again troubled him. It came back; and each Sunday he waited for it, was annoyed by it, and was seized by hatred of it, and resolved to make away with it.

So, having shut the door and scattered some crumbs of cake on the steps, he stationed himself before the hole with a switch in his hand.

After a very long time a pink muzzle appeared, then all the mouse. He struck a light blow and remained stupefied before the tiny body that no longer moved. A drop of blood stained the pavement. He wiped it off

hastily with his sleeve, threw the mouse outside, and said nothing about it to any one.

All sorts of small birds picked at the seeds in the garden. He took it into his head to put peas into a hollow reed. When he heard a twittering in the garden, he approached softly, then raised his tube, puffed his cheeks, and the little creatures rained upon his shoulders so abundantly that he could not keep from laughing, overjoyed at his mischief.

One morning, as he was returning along the wall, he caught sight of a big pigeon on top of the rampart, pouting in the sun. Julian stopped to look at it; there was a gap in the wall just there, a splinter of stone came to his hand. He bent his arm, and the stone knocked down the bird, which fell in a heap into the moat.

He hurried down, tearing himself on the bushes, searching everywhere, more active than a young dog.

The pigeon was quivering with broken wings, hanging in the branches of a privet-bush.

Its persistence in life irritated the child. He set about wringing its neck, and the bird's convulsions made his heart beat, and filled it with a savage and tumultuous pleasure. When it at last stiffened, he felt himself fainting.

That evening, at supper, his father declared that a boy of his age ought to learn venery; and he went to look for an old manuscript containing all the pastime of the chase in question and answer. In it a master showed his pupil the art of entering dogs and manning hawks, of setting snares, how to recognize the stag by his fumets, the fox by his foot-prints, the wolf by his pads; the best way to discover their tracks, how they are started, and where their refuges usually are; what are the most favourable winds, with an enumeration of the calls and rules of the quarry.

When Julian could repeat all those things by heart, his father made up a pack of hounds for him.

First were to be seen four and twenty Barbary greyhounds, faster than gazelles, but apt to get out of hand; then seventeen couples of Breton dogs, spotted with white on a red ground, unfaltering in their obedience to command, strong-chested and deep-throated. For the attack of the wild boar and perilous lairs, there were forty griffons, hairy as bears. Mastiffs from Tartary, almost as tall as asses, flame-coloured, broad-backed and straight-legged, were meant to pursue the aurochs. The black coat of the spaniels gleamed like satin; the yelping of the talbots rivalled the music of the beagles. In a separate yard, rattling their chains and rolling their eyes, growled eight Alan bulldogs, formidable brutes, which would spring at a horseman's belly and were not afraid of lions.

They all were fed on wheaten bread, drank from stone troughs, and bore sonorous names.

The falconry, perhaps, even excelled the kennel. The good lord, by dint of money, had procured tercels from the Caucasus, sakers from Babylon, gerfalcons from Germany, and peregrine falcons captured on the cliffs by the shores of frozen seas in distant lands. They were lodged in a shed covered with thatch, and, fastened in order of their size on the perch, had a sod of turf before them, on which they were set from time to time to keep them limber.

Purse-nets, hooks, spring-traps, all sorts of gins, were constructed.

Often they took out to the fields spaniels, which very soon stood. Then the huntsmen, advancing step by step, cautiously spread an immense net over their motionless bodies. A word made them bark; quails started up; and the ladies of the neighbourhood, who had been invited with their husbands, the children and the waiting-women, all threw themselves upon them and caught them easily.

At other times, a drum was beaten to start the hares;

foxes fell into trenches, or else a spring opened and caught a wolf by the foot.

But Julian despised those easy artifices; he preferred to hunt far away from other people, with his horse and his hawk. It was almost always a great tartaret from Scythia, white as snow. Its leather hood was surmounted by a plume, golden bells trembled on its blue feet; and it sat fast on its master's wrist while his horse galloped and the plains unrolled beneath them. Julian, unfastening its leashes, loosed it all at once; the brave bird mounted straight into the air like an arrow; and two unequal specks could be seen twisting, meeting, then disappearing in the heights of the azure. The falcon was not long in descending, tearing some bird in pieces, and came to resume its place on its master's gauntlet, its two wings trembling.

In this fashion Julian flew the heron, the kite, the crow, and the vulture.

He loved, sounding his horn, to follow his dogs as they ran along the hill-sides, leapt the brooks, climbed up to the woods; and when the stag began to sigh under their bites he struck it down swiftly, then took pleasure in the fury of the mastiffs as they devoured it, cut in pieces upon its reeking hide.

On misty days, he hid himself in a marsh to watch for geese, otters and wild duck.

Three squires waited for him at break of day at the foot of the porch, and the old monk, leaning out of his attic window, made signs to him in vain. Julian did not turn back, he went his way in the heat of the sun, in the rain, in storm, drank water from the springs in his hand, ate wild apples as he trotted; if he was tired, he rested beneath an oak; and he came home at midnight covered with blood and mire, with thorns in his hair and smelling of wild beasts. He became like them. When his mother embraced him, he submitted coldly to her clasp, and appeared to be dreaming of something deep.

He slew bears with blows of his hunting-knife, bulls with the axe, wild boars with the spear; and once, even, without so much as a stick, he defended himself against wolves which were gnawing some corpses beneath a gallows.

One winter morning, he set out before daylight, well equipped, a cross-bow on his shoulder and a quiverful of bolts at his saddle-bow.

His Danish jennet, followed by two basset-hounds, made the ground ring as it walked with even pace. Drops of sleet clung to his mantle, a strong breeze was blowing. One side of the horizon cleared; and in the paleness of the twilight he saw some rabbits running about at the mouth of their burrows. The two basset-hounds suddenly dashed upon them, and with a quick shake to this side and that broke their necks.

Soon he entered a wood. On the end of a branch a capercailye benumbed with cold was sleeping with its head under its wing. Julian sliced off both its feet with a backhanded stroke of his sword, and went on his way without picking it up.

Three hours later he found himself on the peak of a mountain so high that the sky seemed almost black. Before him a rock like a long wall sloped down and overhung a precipice; and at its end two wild goats looked down into the abyss. As he had not his bolts, for he had left his horse behind, he determined to climb down to them; crouching, bare-footed, he at last reached the first of the goats and plunged a poniard between its ribs. The second, seized with terror, leapt into space. Julian darted forward to strike it, and, his right foot slipping, he fell across the carcase of the other, his face over the abyss and his arms out-stretched.

Having got down to the plain again, he followed the willows that fringed a stream. Cranes, flying very low,

passed over his head from time to time. Julian felled them with his whip and never missed one.

Meanwhile the warmer air had melted the rime, great mists floated about and the sun appeared. He saw shining far away a frozen lake, which looked like lead. In the middle of the lake was a beast which Julian did not know, a beaver with its black muzzle. In spite of the distance, a bolt brought it down; and he was vexed not to be able to carry away its skin.

Then he went on through an avenue of great trees which formed a sort of triumphal arch with their crowns at the edge of a forest. A roe-deer sprang out of a thicket, a fallow-deer appeared in a cross-way, a badger came out of a hole, a peacock on the grass displayed its tail;—and, when he had killed them all, more roe-deer presented themselves, more fallow-deer, more badgers, more peacocks, and blackbirds, jays, polecats, foxes, hedgehogs, lynxes, an infinity of beasts, more numerous at every step. They played about him, trembling, with sweet and supplicating looks. But Julian never grew tired of killing them, now winding his cross-bow, now unsheathing his sword, now thrusting with his cutlass, without a thought in his mind, without recollection of anything whatsoever. He was hunting in some country somewhere, from a time unknown, simply because he was there, everything done with the ease experienced in dreams. An extraordinary spectacle arrested him. Stags filled a valley shaped like a circus; and huddled one against the other they warmed themselves with their breaths, which could be seen reeking in the mist.

The prospect of such carnage choked him with delight for some minutes. Then he dismounted, turned up his sleeves, and began to shoot.

At the whistling of the first bolt, all the stags turned round their heads at once. Gaps showed in their mass; plaintive voices sounded, and a great commotion agitated the herd.

The sides of the valley were too high for them to clear. They sprang about in the enclosure, seeking to escape. Julian aimed, let go, and his arrows fell like the rainstreaks in a storm-shower. The maddened stags fought, reared, climbed upon one another; and their bodies locked by their antlers made a great hillock which crumbled away as it moved.

At last they were dead, lying on the sand, the foam at their nostrils, their entrails protruding, the heaving of their flanks subsiding by degrees. Then all was still.

Night was about to fall; and behind the wood, between the branches, the sky was like a lake of blood.

Julian leant his back against a tree. With listless eye he contemplated the enormity of the massacre, not understanding how he had been able to do it.

On the other side of the valley, at the edge of the forest, he saw a stag, a hind and her fawn.

The stag, which was black and of monstrous size, had sixteen points and a white beard. The hind, light as withered leaves in colour, was browsing on the grass; and the dappled fawn sucked at her dug without hindering her progress.

The cross-bow snored once again. The fawn, that same instant, was killed. Then its dam, looking to the sky, brayed in a voice deep, heart-rending, human. With a shot full in the breast the exasperated Julian stretched her on the earth.

The great stag had seen him, and gave a spring. Julian discharged his last bolt at him. It struck his forehead and remained fixed there.

The great stag did not seem to feel it; striding over the dead he kept advancing, was about to charge down upon him and disembowel him; and Julian drew back in unspeakable terror. The prodigious animal halted; and with flaming eyes, solemn as a patriarch or a justiciary, while a bell tolled in the distance, it thrice repeated:

"Accursed! Accursed! Accursed! Some day, ferocious heart, thou wilt murder thy father and mother!"

It bent its knees, closed its eyelids gently, and died.

Julian was stupefied, then overcome by sudden fatigue; and an immense disgust, an immense sadness, took possession of him. With his head in both his hands, he wept a long time.

His horse was lost; his dogs had left him; the solitude which enfolded him seemed all menacing with vague perils. Then, seized with fright, he took a way across country, chose a path at hazard, and found himself almost immediately at the castle-gate.

That night he did not sleep. Under the swaying of the hanging lamp he continually saw the great black stag. Its prediction obsessed him; he fought against it. "No, no, no! I cannot kill them!" Then he thought, "But what if I wished it?" And he was in dread lest the Devil should inspire him with the desire.

For three long months, his mother prayed in anguish at his pillow, and his father walked continually up and down the corridors in anguish, groaning. He summoned the most famous master-leeches, who ordered quantities of drugs. Julian's malady, they said, was caused by some noxious wind or some amorous desire. But to all questions the young man shook his head.

His strength came back to him; and they walked him out in the courtyard, the old monk and the good lord each supporting him by an arm.

When he was completely restored, he refrained obstinately from the chase.

His father, wishing to cheer him, made him a present of a great Saracen sword.

It was at the top of a pillar, in a trophy. To reach it a ladder was required. Julian climbed it. The heavy sword slipped through his fingers, and grazed the good

lord so closely, as it fell, that his gown was cut by it; Julian thought he had killed his father, and fainted.

Thenceforth he had a dread of weapons. The sight of a naked blade made him blench. This weakness caused great distress to his family.

At length the old monk commanded him in the name of God and for the honour of his ancestors to resume the exercises of a gentleman.

The squires amused themselves every day with throwing the javelin. In this Julian very soon excelled. He sent his into bottle-mouths, broke the teeth of the weather-vanes, hit the nails-studs of the doors at a hundred paces.

One summer evening, at the hour when the mist renders things indistinct, he was under the trellis in the garden and saw down at the end two white wings that fluttered at the height of the fence. He never doubted but it was a stork; and he darted his javelin.

A piercing cry resounded.

It was his mother, whose headdress with its long lappets remained pinned to the wall.

Julian fled from the castle, and was never seen there again.

II

He joined himself to a band of adventurers who were passing.

He learned to know hunger, thirst, fevers, and vermin. He became accustomed to the din of mellays and the sight of the dying. The wind tanned his skin. His limbs became calloused by contact with his armour; and since he was very strong, courageous, temperate, and of good counsel, he had no trouble in obtaining the command of a company.

At the beginning of a battle he roused his soldiers with a great wave of his sword. With a knotted rope he climbed the walls of citadels at night, swayed about by

the hurricane, while the drops of Greek fire stuck to his cuirass, and the boiling pitch and melted lead streamed down from the battlements. Often the hurtling of a stone shivered his buckler. Bridges overloaded with men collapsed beneath him. With a sweep of his mace he rid himself of fourteen horsemen. In the lists he defeated all who came forward. More than a score of times he was taken for dead.

Thanks to divine favour he always escaped; for he protected churchmen, orphans, widows, and especially aged men. When he saw one of these last walking in front of him, he called to him, in order to see his face, as if he were afraid of killing him by mistake.

Fugitive slaves, revolted peasants, portionless bastards, all sorts of desperate men flocked to his banner, and he gathered an army of his own.

It increased. He became famous. He was sought after.

He aided in turn the Dauphin of France and the King of England, the Templars of Jerusalem, the Surenas of the Parthians, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Emperor of Calicut. He fought Scandinavians covered with fish-scales, negroes furnished with targets of hippopotamus hide and mounted on red asses, golden-skinned Indians, brandishing above their diadems broad sabres brighter than mirrors. He vanquished the Troglodytes and the Anthropophagi. He traversed regions so torrid that under the burning heat of the sun the hair of men's heads took fire of itself like torches; and others so icy that men's arms came away from their bodies and fell to the ground; and countries where there were so many fogs that they marched surrounded by phantoms.

States in difficulty consulted him. He obtained unhoped-for terms in interviews with ambassadors. If a monarch governed ill, he arrived suddenly and remonstrated with him. He set peoples free. He delivered queens shut up in towers. It was he, and no other,

who smote the great serpent of Milan and the dragon of Oberbirbach.

Now, the Emperor of Occitania, having triumphed over the Spanish Mussulmans, had united in concubinage with the sister of the Caliph of Cordova, and had a daughter by her, whom he had brought up as a Christian. But the Caliph, making as if he wished to be converted, came to him on a visit accompanied by a numerous escort, massacred all his garrison and plunged him into a dungeon-pit, where he treated him most harshly, in order to extract treasure from him.

Julian hastened to his aid, destroyed the army of the infidels, laid siege to the town, slew the Caliph, cut off his head, and threw it like a ball over the ramparts. Then he took the Emperor from his prison and caused him to remount his throne in presence of all his court.

As the price of such a service, the Emperor presented him with much silver in baskets; Julian would have none of it. Believing that he desired more, he offered him three-quarters of his wealth; another refusal. Then to share his kingdom; Julian thanked him and declined. And the Emperor wept for vexation, not knowing how to testify his gratitude, when he struck his forehead, said a word into the ear of a courtier, the curtains of a tapestry were raised, and a young girl appeared.

Her great black eyes shone like two soft lamps. A charming smile parted her lips. The ringlets of her hair were caught in the jewels on her open dress; and under the transparence of her tunic her youthful form was half-revealed. She was all dainty and plump, with a slender waist.

Julian was dazzled with love, the more so as he had so far led a life of extreme chastity.

So he received the Emperor's daughter in marriage, with a castle which she held of her mother; and, the nuptials ended, they parted with no end of compliments on either side.

The palace was of white marble, built in the Moresque style, on a headland, in a grove of orange-trees. Terraces of flowers stretched down to the border of a bay, where pink shells crunched under the feet. Behind the castle extended a forest in the shape of a fan. The sky was always blue, and the trees bent now beneath the sea-breeze, now beneath the wind from the mountains that framed the distant horizon.

The rooms, full of twilight, were illumined by the incrustations upon the walls. Tall columns, slender as reeds, supported the vaulting of the cupolas, which were decorated with reliefs in imitation of the stalactites of grottoes.

There were fountains in the halls, mosaics in the court-yards, festooned partition-walls, a thousand refinements of architecture and everywhere such silence that one could hear the rustling of a scarf or the echo of a sigh.

Julian made war no longer. He rested, surrounded by a people at peace; and each day a crowd passed before him with genuflexions and hand-kissing in the Oriental fashion.

Clad in purple he leaned on his elbows in a window-recess and recalled his hunts of bygone days; and he could have wished to be coursing over the desert after the gazelles and the ostriches, to be hiding in the bamboos on the watch for leopards, to be traversing the forests full of rhinoceroses, climbing to the summit of the most inaccessible mountains to get better aim at the eagles, or fighting the white bears on the icebergs of the sea.

Sometimes in a dream he saw himself like our father Adam in the midst of Paradise among all the beasts; he stretched out his arm and made them die; or else they passed before him two by two in order of their bigness, from the elephants and the lions to the ermines and the ducks, as on the day when they entered Noah's Ark. In the shade of a cavern he darted unerring javelins

upon them; others came; there was no end to them; and he woke up rolling his eyes savagely.

Princes of his acquaintance invited him to hunt. He always refused, thinking by this sort of penance to avert his misfortune; for it seemed to him that the fate of his parents depended on the murder of the animals. But he suffered from not seeing them, and his other desire became intolerable.

To divert him his wife sent for jugglers and dancing-girls.

She walked with him, in an open litter, in the country; at other times stretched on the side of a skiff they watched the fish straying in the water clear as the sky. Often she threw flowers in his face; sitting at his feet she drew music from a three-stringed mandoline; then, placing her clasped hands on his shoulder, she would ask in a timid voice, "Why, what ails you, my dear lord?"

He gave no reply, or burst into sobs; at last one day he confessed his horrible thought.

She opposed it with very sound arguments: his father and mother were probably dead; if ever he saw them again, by what chance, with what purpose, would he come to work this abomination? Therefore his fears were groundless, and he ought to take to hunting again.

Julian smiled as he heard her, but he did not decide to satisfy her desire.

One evening in the month of August, when they were in their room, she had just gone to bed, and he was kneeling for his prayers, when he heard the barking of a fox, then light footsteps under the window; and caught sight in the dusk of something that looked like animals. The temptation was too strong. He took his quiver down from the peg.

She seemed surprised.

"It is to obey you!" he said, "I shall be back by sunrise."

For all that, she was apprehensive of some unhappy accident.

He reassured her, then went out, astonished at the inconsequence of her moods.

Soon afterwards a page came to announce that two strangers, in the absence of the lord, asked to see the lady at once.

And soon came into the room an old man and an old woman, bent, dusty, in coarse garments, each leaning on a staff.

They took courage and declared that they brought Julian news of his parents.

She leant forward to listen to them.

Meanwhile, having understood each other by a glance, they asked her if he always loved them still, if he ever spoke about them.

"Oh, yes," she said.

Then they exclaimed:

"Well, we are they!" And they sat down very weary and overcome with fatigue.

Nothing could persuade the young wife that her husband was their son.

They proved it to her by describing certain marks which he had on his body.

She sprang from her couch, called her page, and a repast was set before them.

Although they were very hungry, they could not eat much; and even at a distance she could perceive the trembling of their gnarled hands as they took the goblets.

They had a thousand questions to ask about Julian. She answered them all, but was careful to say nothing about his gloomy notion with regard to them.

When there was no sign of his return, they had left their castle; and they had travelled for several years, following vague indications, without losing hope. They had required so much money for the ferries and in the

hostelries, for the rights of princes and the exactions of robbers, that they had come to the bottom of their purse and were now begging. What matter, now that they were soon to embrace their son? They extolled his happiness in having so gracious a wife, and never wearied admiring her and kissing her.

The richness of the apartment astonished them greatly, and the old man, having examined the walls, asked why they bore the blazon of the Emperor of Occitania.

She replied:

"He is my father!"

At that he trembled, recalling the prediction of the gipsy, and the old woman thought of the word of the hermit. Doubtless her son's glory was but the dawn of the splendours of eternity; and the pair remained awe-struck in the light of the candelabra which illumined the table.

They must have been very handsome in their youth. The mother still had all her hair, the fine braids of which, like wreaths of snow, hung down to the bottom of her cheeks; and the father, with his tall form and his long beard, was like a church statue.

Julian's wife counselled them not to wait for him. She put them to bed herself in her own room, then closed the casement; they fell asleep. Day was about to appear and outside the window the little birds were beginning to sing.

Julian had crossed the park; and was marching in the forest with vigorous step, rejoicing in the softness of the grass and the sweetness of the air.

The shadows of the trees lay upon the moss. Sometimes the moon made white patches in the glades, and he hesitated to go on, thinking that he saw a sheet of water, or again the surface of calm pools blended with the colour of the herbage. Everywhere was a great

silence; and he discovered none of the animals which had been roaming round his castle only a few minutes before.

The wood became thicker, the darkness profound. Puffs of warm wind passed by, full of softening perfumes. He sank in heaps of dead leaves, and leant against an oak to take breath.

All at once, behind him leapt a darker mass, a wild boar. Julian had not time to seize his bow, and grieved at that as if it were a misfortune.

Then, coming out of the wood, he caught sight of a wolf slinking along a hedge.

Julian sent an arrow after it. The wolf halted, turned its head to look at him, and went on its way. It trotted on, always keeping the same distance between them, halted now and then, and, as soon as it was aimed at, took to flight again.

In this manner Julian traversed an interminable plain, then sandhills, and found himself at last on a table-land commanding a great stretch of country. Flat rocks were strewn among caves and ruins. He stumbled over dead men's bones; here and there mouldering crosses leaned over in melancholy fashion. But shapes moved in the uncertain shadow of the tombs, and out of it came hyenas, excited, panting. Their claws clattering on the flagstones, they came up to him, and smelled him with yawns that showed their gums. He unsheathed his sabre. They fled at once in all directions and, continuing their limping and precipitate gallop, were lost in the distance amid a cloud of dust.

An hour later, he met in a ravine a furious bull, his horns levelled, pawing the sand with his hoof. Julian thrust his lance under his dewlap. It shattered as if the animal had been made of brass; he shut his eyes and waited for his death. When he opened them again, the bull had disappeared.

At that his soul was overwhelmed with shame. A

superior power was taking away his strength; and he went back to the forest to return home.

It was entangled with creepers; and he was cutting them with his sabre when a polecat suddenly slipped between his legs, a panther made a spring over his shoulder, a serpent climbed in a spiral about an ash-tree.

In its foliage was a monstrous jackdaw, which looked at Julian; and, here and there, a number of great sparks showed among the branches, as if the sky had caused all its stars to rain down on the forest. They were the eyes of animals, wild cats, squirrels, owls, parrots, monkeys.

Julian darted his arrows at them; the arrows with their feathers settled on the leaves like white butterflies. He hurled stones at them; the stones fell back without hitting anything. He cursed himself, could have struck himself, howled imprecations, was like to choke with rage.

And all the animals that he had pursued were represented, forming a circle close about him. Some were squatted on their rumps, the others standing at their full height. He stood in the centre, frozen with terror, incapable of the smallest movement. By a supreme effort of will, he took a step; the animals perched on the trees spread their wings, those which trod the ground moved their limbs; and all accompanied him.

The hyenas marched before him, the wolf and the wild boar behind. The bull at his right hand rocked its head, and at his left the serpent writhed through the plants, while the panther, with arched back, advanced with velvety step in great strides. He moved as gently as possible, not to irritate them, and from the depths of the thickets he saw issuing porcupines, foxes, vipers, jackals and bears.

Julian started to run; they ran too. The serpent hissed, the foul-smelling beasts drooled. The wild boar rubbed his heels with its tusks, the wolf the palms of his

hands with its hairy muzzle. The monkeys grimaced as they pinched him, the polecat rolled over his feet. A bear took away his bonnet with a back-stroke of its paw; and the panther scornfully let fall an arrow which it carried in its mouth.

A certain irony was evident in their stealthy proceedings. Looking at him out of the corner of their eyes, they seemed to be meditating a plan of revenge; and, deafened by the humming of insects, beaten by birds' tails, suffocated by breaths, he walked with his arms stretched forward, his eyelids closed, like a blind man, without even the strength to cry "Mercy!"

The crow of a cock vibrated in the air. Others answered it; it was day; and over the orange-trees he recognized the summit of his palace.

Then, at the edge of a field, he saw, three paces off, some red partridges fluttering in the stubble. He undid his cloak and flung it over them like a net. When he uncovered them, he could find only one, and that one long dead and rotten.

This deception exasperated him more than all the others. His thirst for carnage came back to him; failing beasts, he could have massacred men.

He climbed the three terraces, burst in the door with a blow of his fist; but at the foot of the stairs the thought of his dear wife relieved his heart. She was sleeping, no doubt, and he would go and surprise her.

Having drawn off his sandals, he turned the lock gently and entered.

The leaded panes obscured the pale light of the dawn. Julian caught his feet in some garments on the floor; further on, he stumbled against a side-board still covered with dishes. "She must have been eating," he said to himself, and went towards the bed, which was lost in the darkness of the farther side of the room. When he reached the bed-side, in order to embrace his wife, he leant over the pillow where the two heads were reposing

side by side. Thereupon he felt the touch of a beard against his mouth.

He recoiled, thinking he was going mad; but he returned to the bedside, and his fingers, as he felt about, came against hair which was very long. To convince himself of his error, he passed his hand gently over the pillow yet again. It was indeed a beard, this time, and a man!—a man lying with his wife!

Bursting into a wrath beyond measure, he fell upon them with his poniard; and he stamped and foamed, with howls like a savage beast. Then he stopped. The dead, pierced to the heart, had not so much as moved. He listened attentively to the two groanings almost equal, and, as they subsided, another one far away continued them. Indistinct at first, this plaintive, long-drawn voice came nearer, became loud, cruel: and to his terror he recognized it for the belling of the great black stag.

And, as he turned round, he thought he saw in the door-way the phantom of his wife, light in hand.

The din of the murder had brought her. With one staring glance she comprehended all, and, flying in horror, let fall her candle.

He picked it up.

His father and mother lay before him, stretched on their backs, with their bosoms pierced; and their countenances, of a majestic gentleness, were as if they guarded some eternal secret. Smears and clots of blood showed on their white skin, on the sheets, on the floor, upon an ivory crucifix hanging in the alcove. The crimson reflection of the window, touched at that moment by the sun, lit up those crimson stains, and cast yet others all over the apartment. Julian went up to the two bodies saying to himself, trying to persuade himself, that it could not be, that he was mistaken, that there are sometimes extraordinary resemblances. At last he stooped to look more closely at the old man; and

he saw between the half-closed eyelids a lifeless eye that burnt him like fire. Then he crossed to the other side of the couch, occupied by the other corpse, the face of which was partially concealed by its white hair. Julian passed his hand under its braids, lifted its head;—and he gazed at it, holding it at the length of his rigid arm, while he lighted himself with the candle in his other hand. Some drops soaking through the mattress fell one by one upon the boards.

At the end of the day he presented himself before his wife; and, in a voice unlike his own, commanded her first, not to answer him, not to come near him, not even to look at him, then to follow, under pain of damnation, all his orders, which were irrevocable.

The obsequies were to be carried out according to the instructions which he had left in writing on a faldstool in the chamber of the dead. He left her his palace, his vassals, all his possessions, not even retaining the clothes on his body, nor his sandals, which they would find at the top of the staircase.

She had obeyed the will of God in being the occasion of his crime, and was to pray for his soul, since thenceforward he should be as one dead.

The dead were magnificently interred in the chapel of a monastery three days' journey from the castle. A monk with his cowl drawn over his head followed the train far apart from the rest, and no one dared to speak to him.

During the Mass he remained flat on his belly in the porch, his arms outstretched in a cross, and his brow in the dust.

After the burial, they saw him take the road that led to the mountains. He turned round several times, and at last disappeared.

III

He went away, begging his bread through the world.

He held out his hand to horsemen on the highways, approached the harvesters with genuflexions, or remained motionless before the barriers of courts; and his visage was so sad that they never refused him alms.

In his humility he told his story; thereupon all fled from him, crossing themselves. In the villages where he had already passed, as soon as he was recognized, they shut the doors, shouted threats at him, threw stones at him. The more charitable set a dish on their window-sill, then closed the shutter so as not to see him.

Repulsed everywhere, he avoided men; and nourished himself with roots, plants, wild fruits, and shell-fish which he sought along the shores.

Sometimes on turning a hill he would see below him a confusion of crowded roofs, with stone spires, bridges, towers, black streets crossing one another, whence a continual hum rose up to his ears.

The need of mingling with the existence of others would force him to descend to the town. But the brutish air of the faces, the din of occupations, the indifference of their talk, froze his heart. On feast-days, when the great bell of some cathedral filled the whole people with joy from break of day, he watched the inhabitants issuing from their houses, then the dances in the squares, the fountains running ale at the crossings, the damask hangings outside the lodgings of princes, and at evening, through the panes of the ground-floors, the long family tables, where grandparents held little children on their knees; sobs choked him and he turned back to the country.

He contemplated with transports of love the foals in the pastures, the birds in their nests, the insects on the flowers; at his approach all fled farther away, hid themselves in alarm, flew off as fast as they could.

He sought the solitudes again. But the wind brought what seemed groans of death-agony to his ear; the tears of the dew falling to earth recalled other drops of heavier weight to his mind. The sun showed like blood in the clouds every evening; and every night, in a dream, his parricide began anew.

He made himself a haircloth shirt with iron points. He climbed on his two knees up every hill that had a chapel on its summit. But pitiless thought obscured the splendours of the sanctuaries, and tortured him amid the macerations of his penance.

He did not revolt against God who had inflicted this deed upon him, and yet he was in despair to think that he could have wrought it.

His own person caused him such horror that he adventured himself in perils in the hope of delivering himself from it. He saved paralytics from fires, children from the bottom of gulfs. The abyss rejected him, the flames spared him.

Time did not ease his sufferings. They became intolerable. He resolved to die.

And one day that he found himself at the edge of a fountain, as he stooped over it to judge the depth of the water, he saw facing him an old man, all fleshless, with white beard and so lamentable an aspect that he could not restrain his tears. The other wept also. Without recognizing his own reflection, Julian had a confused remembrance of a face that resembled it. He uttered a cry; it was his father; and he had no more thought of killing himself.

So bearing about the burden of his memory he covered many countries; and he arrived beside a river the crossing of which was dangerous because of its violence, and because there was a great stretch of mud on its banks. No one had dared to cross it for a long time.

An old boat, sunk by the stern, reared its prow among the reeds. On examining it, Julian discovered

a pair of oars; and the thought struck him to employ his existence in the service of others.

He began by establishing a sort of causeway on the bank, which would permit of descending to the channel; and he broke his nails dislodging enormous stones, thrust his stomach against them to move them, slid in the mud, sunk in it, all but perished several times.

Then he repaired the boat with some wreckage, and built himself a cabin with clay and tree-trunks.

When the ferry became known, travellers presented themselves. They summoned him from the other bank by waving flags; Julian quickly sprang into his boat. It was very heavy; and they overloaded it with all sort of baggage and bundles, not to speak of the beasts of burden, which, plunging with terror, increased the encumbrance. He asked nothing for his trouble; some gave him scraps of victuals that they took from their wallets, or worn-out clothes that they no longer wanted. Rough characters vociferated blasphemies. Julian reproached them gently, and they retorted with insults. He contented himself with blessing them.

A little table, a stool, a bed of dead leaves and three earthenware cups, that was all his furniture. Two holes in the wall served for windows. On one side, as far as the eye could reach, extended sterile plains with pale meres on their surface here and there; and in front of him the great river rolled its greenish waves. In spring the humid earth had an odour of rottenness. Then a wanton wind would raise the dust in clouds. It came in everywhere, muddied the water, crunched under his teeth. A little later, there were clouds of mosquitoes, whose trumpeting and stinging never ceased day or night. Next came cruel frosts, which gave things the rigidity of stone and caused a mad longing to eat flesh.

Months passed without Julian seeing any person. Often he closed his eyes, trying by way of memory to return to his youth;—and a castle yard appeared with

greyhounds in a porch, serving-men in the hall, and beneath an arbour of vines a fair-haired youth between an old man in furs and a lady with a great head-dress; all at once the two corpses were there. He threw himself flat on his face upon his bed and weeping repeated:

"Ah, poor father! poor mother! poor mother!" and fell into a swoon in which the doleful visions continued.

One night as he slept he thought he heard some one calling him. He listened intently and could make out nothing but the roaring of the waves. But the same voice repeated:

"Julian!"

It came from the other side, which seemed extraordinary, considering the breadth of the river.

A third time the call came:

"Julian!"

And the loud voice had the tone of a church-bell.

Lighting his lantern he went out of his cabin. A furious hurricane filled the night. The darkness was profound, rent here and there by the whiteness of leaping waves.

After a moment's hesitation, Julian unfastened the moorings. The water immediately became calm, the boat glided upon it and touched the other bank, where a man was waiting.

He was wrapped in a tattered sheet, his face like a plaster mask, and his two eyes redder than coals. On holding his lantern to him, Julian saw that he was covered with a hideous leprosy; yet he had in his bearing a sort of kingly majesty.

As soon as he entered the boat, it sank prodigiously, crushed under his weight; a shock sent it up again, and Julian began to row.

At each stroke of the oar the surge of the waves heaved up the bow. The water, blacker than ink, rushed furiously past either side of the planking. It scooped

out abysses, it made mountains, and the skiff now leaped up, now sank back into depths where it spun round, tossed about by the wind.

Julian bent his back, stretched his arms, and taking a purchase with his feet, came back, bending from his waist, in order to get more power. The hail lashed his hands, the rain ran down his back, the violence of the wind choked him, he halted. Then the boat was carried away by the current. But, comprehending that some great thing was afoot, some order which he durst not disobey, he took to his oars again; and the creaking of the tholes broke on the clamour of the tempest.

The little lantern burned in front of him. Birds flying past hid it at intervals. But he saw always the eyes of the Leper, who sat up in the stern immobile as a column.

And this lasted long, very long!

When they arrived in the cabin, Julian shut the door; and he saw him sitting on the stool. The sort of shroud that covered him had fallen to his haunches; and his shoulders, his chest, his meagre arms, were hidden under patches of scaly pustules. Enormous wrinkles furrowed his brow. Like a skeleton, he had a hole in place of a nose; and his bluish lips gave out a breath as thick as a fog and nauseating.

"I'm hungry," he said.

Julian gave him what he had, an old piece of bacon and the crusts of a black loaf.

When he had devoured them, the table, the dish, and the haft of the knife all bore the same marks as were to be seen on his body.

Next he said, "I'm thirsty!"

Julian went to get his pitcher; and as he took it an aroma came from it which made his heart swell and his nostrils dilate, it was wine; what a find! But the Leper put out his arm and emptied the whole pitcher at one draught.

Then he said, "I'm cold!"

With his candle Julian set light to a bundle of fern in the middle of the hut.

The Leper went to it to warm himself; and, squatted on his heels, he trembled in every limb, became weaker; his eyes no longer shone, his sores ran, and in a voice almost inaudible he murmured:

"Your bed!"

Julian aided him gently to drag himself to it, and even spread over him, to cover him, the sail of his boat.

The Leper groaned. The corners of his mouth exposed his teeth, a quicker rattle shook his breast, and at each breath his belly sank in to his backbone.

Then he closed his eyelids.

"My bones are like ice! Come beside me!"

And Julian, lifting up the canvas, lay down on the dead leaves, beside him.

The Leper turned his head.

"Undress yourself, so that I can have the warmth of your body!"

Julian stripped off his garments, then, naked as at the day of his birth, got into bed again, and against his thigh he felt the Leper's skin, colder than a serpent and rough as a file.

He tried to cheer him, and the other answered panting:

"Ah, I am dying!... Come close to me, warm me! No, not with your hands! No, with your whole body!"

Julian stretched himself full length upon him, mouth against mouth and breast against breast.

Then the Leper caught him in his embrace, and his eyes all at once assumed the brightness of stars; his hair lengthened out like sunbeams, the breath of his nostrils had the sweetness of roses; a cloud of incense rose from the hearth; the waves sang. Thereat a fulness of delight, a joy more than human, descended like a flood upon Julian's fainting soul; and he whose arms clasped him grew greater and greater, till he touched either wall of the hut with his head and feet. The roof

flew off, the firmament opened wide,—and Julian mounted up to the azure spaces, face to face with Our Lord Jesus, who bore him away into Heaven.

Such is the story of Saint Julian Hospitator, almost exactly as it is to be seen in a church-window in my native province.

THE GATE-KEEPER

FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

HER Majesty the Queen of Bohemia—for story-tellers there will always be a kingdom of Bohemia—is travelling in the strictest and most modest incognito, under the name of the Comtesse des Sept-Châteaux and accompanied only by the old Baroness de Georgenthal, her reader, and General Horschowitz, her gentleman in waiting.

In spite of their hot-water pans and furs, it has been cold all the time in their reserved compartment, and when the Queen, tired of her English novel, or fidgetted by the general's knitting—for the general knits—wished to look out at the landscape white with snow, she was forced to rub a moment with her handkerchief on the carriage-window, which the frost covered with sparkling crystals and delicate ferns of ice. It is a singular caprice indeed that her Majesty has had, and well worthy of a twenty-year-old head, to set out for Paris in mid-winter, there to meet her mother, the Queen of Moravia, though she had arranged to see her at Prague next spring. In spite of that, she must needs start on her journey in ten degrees below zero, the baroness has had to shake up her old rheumatic bones, the general, in despair, has left a magnificent bedspread behind him that he was busy knitting for his daughter-in-law, taking nothing with him to beguile the tedium of the journey but material for a modest pair of worsted stockings. The journey has been bad; all Europe is covered with snow, and they have

come half-way across, with many delays and difficulties, on railways where the service is disorganized by the severity of the season. At last the end is coming near; this evening, at nine o'clock, they have dined in the refreshment room at Mâcon, and now, though to-night the foot-warmers are once more barely lukewarm, and outside the great flakes whirl in the darkness, the baroness and the general, slumbering under their furred mantles and their rugs, dream in their corners of their arrival and their stay in Paris, where the good lady will be able to fulfil a special little piece of devotion, and where the old campaigner will betake himself without delay to a certain wool-shop in the Rue Saint-Honoré, the only one where he can match his green skeins to his satisfaction.

As for the Queen, she is not sleeping.

Feverish and shivering in her great blue-fox pelisse, her elbow in the padded rest, and her hand clenched amid the disorder of her magnificent straw-coloured hair which escapes from her smart travelling toque, she is reflecting, her great eyes open in the half-shadow, listening mechanically to the vague and distant music that the tired ears of travellers fancy they hear in the iron gallop of an express. She reviews in memory all her existence, poor young Queen, and she reflects that she is very unhappy.

First she sees herself again as the little princess with red hands and a flat waist, beside her twin sister, the one who is married far away in the North, her sister whom she loved so, and who resembled her so closely that when they were dressed alike they had to have different-coloured bows put in their hair to distinguish them. That was before the rising had overthrown her parents' throne; and she loved the calm, sleepy atmosphere of the little court of Olmutz, where etiquette was tempered with homeliness; that was the time when her father, the good King Louis V., who has since died in

exile of a broken heart, used to take her for a walk across the park, without laying aside his court-suit and his stars, to drink coffee with her sister at four o'clock in the afternoon, in a Chinese pavilion overrun with convolvulus and virgin's bower, from which the course of the river was seen and the distant amphitheatre of the hills reddened by the autumn.

Then there was her marriage and the grand state-ball, on that lovely night in July, when they heard through the open windows the murmur ascending from the crowd that thronged the illuminated gardens. How she trembled when she had been left alone for an instant in the conservatory with the young King! Yet she loved him already, she had always loved him from her first glimpse of him, when he had advanced, the white aigrette in his busby, so elegant and supple in his blue uniform all over diamonds, at each step jingling the curved gold spurs on his little grey boots with a thousand folds. After the first waltz Ottokar had taken her arm, and, caressing his long black moustache all the time, had led her to the conservatory, had made her sit down under a great palm, then, placing himself beside her and taking her hand with the most noble ease, had said to her, looking her in the eyes, "Princess, will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?" Then she had blushed, bowed her head, and replied, repressing with one hand the mad beating of her heart, "Yes, Sire!" while the furious violins of the Hungarians attacked all together the first notes of the Czech March, that sublime song of enthusiasm and triumph!

Alas, how quickly that happiness had taken wings! Six months of error and illusion, barely six months, and then, one day, when soon to become a mother, a brutal chance had informed her that she had been deceived, that the King did not love her, never had loved her, that the very day after his marriage he had supped with La Gazella, the *première danseuse* at the Prague Theatre, a

common strumpet. And that was not all! She had then learned what every one knew but herself, Ottokar's old liaison with the Comtesse de Pzibrann, by whom he had three children, whom he had never quitted amid a hundred passing fancies, and whom he had had the audacity to make first lady in waiting to his wife. At one blow the Queen's love was killed, that frail and timid love which she had never dared to avow to her husband, and which she now compared to the pet bird that she had smothered when she was a little girl through closing her hand suddenly at the noise of a Chinese vase broken by a housemaid.

Her son! To be sure she had a son, and she loved him; but, dreadful thought, very often, when seated beside the gilded cradle adorned with the royal crown in which her little Ladislas was sleeping, the Queen had felt an icy pang shoot through her heart as she looked at the child, begotten by a man who had cruelly, cynically outraged her. Besides, she never had him to herself, at least to herself alone. Things were not as they had been at home with her good parents, whom—a fresh grief—a revolution had lately driven far away, and everything in this old-fashioned and pompous court of Bohemia was done according to the laws of the most rigid ceremonial. A whole swarm of duennas and dry nurses, ancient ladies with grand airs and imposing head-gear, bustled about the royal cradle, and, when the Queen went to look at her son and embrace him, they would say to her solemnly, "His Highness was coughing a little during the night. . . . His Highness's teeth are troubling him. . . ." And she felt as if the icy breaths of those women blew on her mother's heart to freeze it and extinguish it.

Ah, she was indeed helpless, poor Queen, and life was too cruel! So sometimes, giving way to vexation and weariness, she obtained permission from the King to go and see the Queen of Moravia, a refugee in France; she

escaped away, she stole out as if from a prison—alone, for tradition forbade the Heir Apparent to travel without his father—and she hastened to pour out all her tears, with her arms round the neck of her grey-haired mother.

This time she had left suddenly, without asking permission, and after a hasty kiss on the brow of the sleeping Ladislas; for she was almost mad with disgust and shame. The King's debauchery was becoming more notorious every day; he now had establishments and families in all the towns of Bohemia, at all his hunting-resorts. It was food for derision everywhere, and satirical verses were sung in the streets of Prague, asking what was to become of this illegitimate race, and if Ottokar, like Augustus the Strong in his day, would not form a squadron of Life Guards from his bastards. To meet the expense of such a warren, the King was turning everything into money, was exhausting and burdening the state. The trade in decorations was particularly scandalous, and a case was quoted of a tailor in Vienna who had made a fortune by selling connoisseurs of foreign crosses, for five hundred florins, black coats, in the pocket and buttonhole of which the purchaser found the diploma and ribbon of Bohemia's most illustrious order, a military order that dates back to the Thirty Years' War.

But what is the matter? For the last minute the train has been slowing down; it stops. What is the meaning of this halt in the open country, at dead of night? The general and the baroness have waked up, much alarmed; and the gentleman in waiting, having let down the window, leans out into the darkness, and, see, the guard's lamp, who was running alongside the carriages in the snow, stops, is raised, and all at once illumines the general's long, white, bristling moustache and his otter cap.

"What's the matter? What's the reason of this stoppage?" asks old Horschowitz.

"The matter is, sir, that we are held up for an hour at least.... Two feet of snow! No way of getting further!... The Parisians will have to do without their coffee to-morrow."

"What? An hour to wait here, in this weather!... You know that the foot-warmers are cold...."

"What can we do, sir?... They have just telegraphed to Tonnerre for a gang to clear the line.... But, I repeat, we're here for an hour at least."

And the man goes off with his lamp toward the engine.

"But this is abominable! Your Majesty will catch cold!" chirps the baroness.

"Yes, I do feel cold," says the Queen, with a shiver.

The general divines that now is the moment to be heroic; he jumps down to the rails, sinks knee-deep in the snow and overtakes the man with the lamp. He says something to him in an undertone.

"I don't care though it was the Grand Mogul, I couldn't do anything," answers the railwayman. "However, we are opposite a gate-keeper's house, there should be a fire there.... And if the lady cares to get down.... Hey, Sabatier!..."

A second lamp comes up.

"Just go and see if there is a fire in the gate-keeper's house."

By great good-fortune there is. The general is happier than if he had won a battle or finished the last strip of his famous knitted bedspread. He returns to the Queen's compartment, announces the result of his exertions, and, an instant afterwards, the three travellers, with much stamping of feet to shake off the snow that has gathered under their shoes, are in the low room of the tiny house, where the gate-keeper, who has just let them in and has kept on his goatskin, kneels in front of the fire and puts dead wood on the fire-dogs.

The Queen, seated in front of the cheerful blaze, has thrown her pelisse over the back of her straw-bottomed chair; she has taken off her long suède gloves to warm her hands, and is looking about her.

It is a peasant's room. The floor is hard and uneven underfoot; bunches of onions hang from the smoky beams; there is an old poacher's gun on two nails over the fire-place, and some flowered dishes on the dresser. The general has just made a wry face on catching sight of two Épinal pictures fastened to the wall with pins: the portrait of M. de Thiers, decorated with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, and that of Garibaldi in a red shirt. But what attracts the young Queen's attention is, beside the great bed, and half hidden by the curtains of striped calico, a wicker cradle, from which the whimpering of a waking child has just sounded.

In a moment the gate-keeper has left his fire and has gone to the cradle, and there he is rocking it gently.

"Go bye-bye, my biddie, go bye-bye! It's nothing, it's friends of papa."

He looks a good father, the man in the goatskin, with his bald Saint Peter's pate, his fierce old soldier's moustache, and the two great, sad wrinkles in his cheeks.

"Is that your little girl?" the Queen asks him, interested.

"Yes, ma'am, she's my Cecily.... She'll be three years old next month."

"But... her mother?" Her Majesty asks with some hesitation, and, as the man shakes his head, "you are a widower?"

But he makes another sign of negation. At that the Queen, greatly moved, rises, goes to the cradle, and looks at Cecily, who has fallen asleep again, tenderly clasping to her heart a little pasteboard poodle.

"Poor child!" she murmurs.

"Don't you think, ma'am," the gate-keeper thereupon

says in a hoarse voice, "don't you think that a mother must be very heartless to leave her daughter at that age? As for her leaving me, after all, that is partly my fault.... I was wrong to marry a wife too young for me, wrong to let her go to town, where she made undesirable acquaintances. But to leave this darling!... Is it not a scandal?... Well, well, I'll have to rear her all by myself, poor little brat!... It's difficult, I can tell you, because of my duties.... At night I have often to leave her there screaming and crying, when I hear the train whistle.... But in the day-time, you see, I carry her about with me, and she is quite used to it already, the darling, she's not afraid of the railway now.... Why, yesterday I held her in my left arm, while I held out my flag with my right. Well, she did not even tremble when the express passed.... What bothers me most, you know, is sewing her dresses and bonnets. It's a good thing that I've been a corporal in the Zouaves in my day, and know a little about needles and thread."

"But, my poor man," replies the Queen, "that is a very difficult task.... See here, I should like to help you... There must be a village in the neighbourhood, and in that village some respectable people who would undertake to look after your little girl.... If it's only a question of money...."

But the gate-keeper shook his head again.

"No, ma'am, no, thank you kindly. I am not proud, and I would cheerfully accept any offer of help for my little Cecily... but I will never part from her... never, not even for an hour!"

"But why?"

"Why?" the man answered in a sad tone. "Because I will trust no one but myself to make the child what her mother has not been... a good woman! But excuse me, would you be so kind as rock Cecily for a little?... I'm wanted on the line."

Will it ever be known what the young Queen of Bohemia thought about that winter night when she nursed a poor gate-keeper's child for a whole hour, while the general and the baroness, whose help she had refused, sat mightily offended by the fire? When the guard opened the door and called, "Come, ladies and gentlemen, the express is about to start again . . . all aboard!" the Queen laid her purse well filled with gold, and the bunch of violets from her waist, on little Cecily's cradle, then she climbed back into the carriage.

But her Majesty spent only two days in Paris; she went back at once to Prague, from which she is scarcely ever absent now, and where she devotes herself entirely to her son's education. The governesses with thirty quarterings who used to cast the shadow of their funereal head-gear over the infancy of the Heir Apparent have only sinecures now. If there are still kings in Europe when little Ladislas has grown up, he will be what his father has not been, a good king. At five years of age he is already very popular, and when he travels with his mother on those dear Bohemian railways that crawl like four-wheelers, and when he sees from the window of the saloon-carriage a gate-keeper carrying a baby on one arm and presenting his little flag with the other, the royal child, to whom his mother has made a sign, always throws him a kiss.

MADEMOISELLE PERLE

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

I

WHAT a strange notion indeed of mine to choose Mademoiselle Perle for queen this evening.

Every year I go to my old friend Chantal's for Twelfth-night. My father, whose most intimate friend he was, used to take me there when a child. I have kept up the custom, and no doubt will continue to keep it up as long as I live, and as long as there is a Chantal in this world.

The Chantals, I ought to say, lead a singular existence: they live at Paris as if they were at Grasse, Yvetot, or Pont-à-Mousson.

They have a house with a small garden near the Observatory. There they live their own life as if they were in the country. Of Paris, the real Paris, they have no knowledge and no suspicion: they are so far, far away from it! Sometimes, however, they take a journey, a long journey, there. Madame Chantal goes to lay in supplies, as they say in the family. This is how they lay in supplies.

Mademoiselle Perle, who keeps the keys of the pantry-presses (for the linen-presses are administered by the mistress of the house herself), Mademoiselle Perle notices that the sugar is running done, that the preserves are exhausted, that there is not much more left at the bottom of the coffee-sack.

Thus warned against famine, Madame Chantal inspects the remains, and takes notes in a note-book. Then, when she has written a great many figures, she plunges first into long calculations, then into long discussions with Mademoiselle Perle. The upshot of it is, however, that they come to an agreement and settle upon the quantities of each article that they will provide for a quarter, sugar, rice, prunes, coffee, preserves, tins of green peas, of haricot beans, of lobster, salt and smoked fish, and so on, and so on.

This done, they fix the day for their shopping, and set out in a cab, a cab with a rail, to a biggish grocer, whose shop is across the bridges, in the new districts.

Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Perle make this expedition in company, mysteriously, and come home at dinner-time quite exhausted, though still excited, and shaken up in the cab, the top of which is covered with parcels and bags, like a removal van.

For the Chantals all Paris on the other side of the Seine is the new districts, districts inhabited by a strange population, noisy, not too honest, that passes its days in dissipation, its nights in feasting, and makes ducks and drakes of its money. Nevertheless the young ladies are now and again taken to the theatre, the Opéra-Comique or the Théâtre Français, when the piece is approved by the newspaper that M. Chantal reads.

The young ladies are now nineteen and seventeen years old; they are two pretty girls, tall and fresh, very well brought up, too well brought up, so well brought up that they pass unnoticed like two pretty dolls. It would never enter my head to pay attentions or to pay court to Mesdemoiselles Chantal: one scarcely dares to speak of them, they seem so immaculate, and as for bowing to them, one almost fears he is taking a liberty.

As for their father, he is a charming man, very well informed, very frank, very cordial, but whose one desire is repose and peace and quietness, and who is largely

responsible for thus mummifying his family in order to live as he desires in stagnant immobility. He reads a great deal, is fond of conversation, is easily touched. The absence of all contact, elbowing and collisions has made him very sensitive and thin-skinned. The least thing excites him, agitates him, and hurts him.

Yet the Chantals do have some acquaintances, but restricted acquaintances, carefully selected in their neighbourhood. They also exchange two or three annual visits with some relatives who live at a distance.

As for me, I dine with them on the 15th of August and on Twelfth-night. The latter is part of my duty, like a Catholic's Easter communion.

On the 15th of August some friends are invited, but on Twelfth-night I am the only guest.

II

So this year, as in other years, I have been dining at the Chantals' to celebrate Epiphany.

According to custom I embraced M. Chantal, Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Perle, and made a profound bow to Mesdemoiselles Louise and Pauline. They asked me a thousand questions, about town gossip, about politics, about popular opinion on the events in Tonkin, and about our representatives. Madame Chantal, a stout lady, whose ideas always give me the impression that they are squared like so many hewn stones, had a habit of enouncing the phrase, "That will bear evil fruit some day," as the conclusion of every political discussion. Why have I always imagined that Madame Chantal's ideas are square? I do not know, the fact remains that everything she says assumes this shape in my mind; a square, a big square with four equal angles. There are other persons whose ideas always seem to be round and rolling like circles. No sooner have they commenced a phrase on some subject, than it goes rolling and issues in a dozen, a score, fifty round ideas, big and little, which

I see running one after the other to the farthest horizon. Other persons, again, have pointed ideas. . . . But that is neither here nor there.

We sat down to table as usual, and the dinner passed without anything being said worth remembering.

At dessert, the Twelfth-cake was brought in. Now, every year M. Chantal was king. Whether that was a repeated coincidence or a family arrangement, I do not know, but he used infallibly to find the bean in his share of the cake, and used to proclaim Madame Chantal queen. So I was astounded to feel in a mouthful of cake something very hard, which almost broke a tooth for me. I carefully removed the thing from my mouth and saw a little china doll no bigger than a bean. In my surprise, I exclaimed, "Ah!" They looked at me, and Chantal clapped his hands and shouted, "Gaston's got it! Gaston's got it! Long live the king! Long live the king!"

Everybody repeated in chorus, "Long live the king!" and I blushed up to my ears, as one will blush, for no reason whatever, in rather foolish situations. I sat looking down at the cloth, with the scrap of china in my finger and thumb, forcing a laugh, and at a loss what to say or do, when Chantal resumed, "Now, you must choose a queen."

At that I was overwhelmed. In a second, a thousand thoughts, a thousand suppositions flashed through my mind. Did they mean me to single out one of the Chantal girls? Was this a plan for making me say which one I preferred? Was it a gentle, slight, insensible impulse from the parents towards a possible marriage? The notion of marriage is constantly lurking in all those houses with grown-up daughters, and takes all sorts of forms, all sorts of disguises, all sorts of measures. I felt horribly afraid of compromising myself, and also excessively timid in face of the obstinately correct and composed attitude of Mesdemoiselles Louise and Pauline.

To elect one of them to the detriment of the other was, to my mind, as difficult as to choose between two drops of water; and, besides, I was dreadfully scared by the fear of risking myself in an affair where I should be led on to marriage against my will by procedures so discreet, so imperceptible, and so calm as this trumpery royalty.

But all at once I had an inspiration, and I offered the symbolical doll to Mademoiselle Perle. They were all surprised at first; then they undoubtedly appreciated my delicacy and my discretion, for they applauded furiously. "Long live the queen, long live the queen!" they shouted.

As for her, poor old maid, she had lost countenance entirely: she trembled, quite scared, and stammered. "Oh no.... Oh no.... Oh no... not me.... I pray you... not me.... I pray you!"

At that I considered Mademoiselle Perle for the first time in my life, and began to ask myself what she was.

I was accustomed to seeing her in that house, as one sees the old tapestry arm-chairs on which one has sat from childhood, without ever noticing them. Some day, no one knows why, because a sunbeam falls on the chair, one says, "Why, this is very interesting." And one discovers that the wood has been wrought by an artist, and that the covering is remarkable. I had never taken any notice of Mademoiselle Perle.

She was a member of the Chantal household, and nothing more. But why, on what footing?—She was a tall, thin person, who kept herself in the background, but was not insignificant. They treated her friendly, better than a housekeeper, not so well as a relative. Now, however, on a sudden I grasped some fine distinctions which I had not troubled about before! Madame Chantal said "Perle," the girls, "Mademoiselle Perle," and Chantal always called her "Mademoiselle," though perhaps more respectfully than they did.

I began to consider her.—What was her age? Forty?

Yes, forty.—She was not an old maid, she was growing old. This observation suddenly occurred to me. She did her hair, dressed, adorned herself in a ridiculous fashion, yet for all that she was not ridiculous, she had such a simple, natural grace about her, a veiled grace, studiously concealed. What a strange creature, to be sure! Why had I never observed her better? She did her hair in a grotesque fashion, in little, droll, old-fashioned ringlets. Yet under this antiquated Virgin's hairdressing appeared a broad, calm forehead, scored by two deep wrinkles, two wrinkles of long-continued griefs, then two blue eyes, large and gentle, so timid, so startled, so humble, two beautiful eyes that had remained so innocent; so full of maiden astonishment, of youthful sensations, and also of disappointments that had entered into them and softened without troubling them.

Her whole face was intelligent and discreet, one of those faces which have toned down without being worn out or faded by the fatigues or the great emotions of life.

What a pretty mouth! and what pretty teeth! Yet one would have said that she dared not smile!

And suddenly I compared her with Madame Chantal! Why, to be sure! Mademoiselle Perle was handsomer, a hundred times handsomer, more intelligent, more noble, more dignified.

I was stupefied with the result of my observations. Champagne was poured out. I held my glass towards the queen, and proposed her health in a well-turned compliment. She would have liked, I could see, to hide her face in her napkin. Then, as she dipped her lips in the clear wine, every one cried, "The queen drinks, the queen drinks!" At that she blushed all over and choked; but I could see that she was greatly beloved in that house.

III

As soon as dinner was over, Chantal took me by the arm. It was the hour for his cigar, a sacred hour. When he was alone, he went out to smoke it in the street; when he had any one to dinner, they went up to the billiard-room, and he smoked as he played. This evening they had even lighted a fire in the billiard-room in honour of Twelfth-night, and my old friend took his cue, a very thin cue, which he chalked with great care, then he said:

"You lead off, my boy!"

For he always called me "my boy," in spite of my five-and-twenty years; but then he had seen me when I was a baby.

So I commenced the game; I made some cannons, and missed others; but, as Mademoiselle Perle was always running through my mind, I suddenly asked:

"I say, Monsieur Chantal, is Mademoiselle Perle any relation of yours?"

He stopped playing in great surprise, and looked at me.

"What, don't you know? Have you never heard Mademoiselle Perle's story?"

"No."

"Did your father never tell you?"

"No."

"Well, well, that is strange! That is indeed strange! Why, it is quite a romance!"

He was silent, then began again:

"If you only knew how singular it is that you should ask me that question to-day, on Twelfth-night!"

"Why?"

"Ah! Why? Listen. It was forty-one years ago, forty-one years this very day, Epiphany. We were then living at Roüy-le-Tors, on the ramparts. But I must first describe the house, in order that you may under-

stand properly. Roüy is built on a slope, or rather on a knoll which commands a wide extent of that country. We had a house there with a fine hanging garden, supported in the air by the old city walls. So the house was in the town, in the street, while the garden overlooked the plain. There was also a postern-gate from this garden to the country, at the foot of a secret staircase which went down in the thickness of the walls, like those read of in romances. A road passed by this gate, which was furnished with a big bell, for the peasants used to bring their provisions that way to escape the long round about.

"You can see the places, can't you? Well, that year, on Twelfth-day, it had been snowing for a week. It looked like the end of the world. It chilled our very soul when we went to the ramparts to look at the plain, the great white landscape, all white, icy, shining like varnish. It looked as if the good Lord had wrapped up the Earth to send it to the lumber-room of old worlds. I can assure you that it was very dreary.

"The whole family was together at that moment, and we were numerous, very numerous, my father, my mother, my uncle and aunt, my two brothers, and my four cousins; pretty girls they were. I am married to the youngest. Of all that company there are only three alive now, my wife, myself, and my sister-in-law at Marseilles. Bless me, how a family slips away! It makes me tremble when I think of it. I was fifteen then; now I am fifty-six.

"Well, we were going to keep Twelfth-night, and we were very merry, very merry! All were in the drawing-room waiting dinner, when my elder brother, Jacques, suddenly said, 'There's a dog been howling in the plain for the last ten minutes. It must be some poor beast that is lost.'

"We had not finished speaking when the garden-bell rang. It had a deep church-bell tone, which made one

think of the dead. We all shivered at the sound. My father called the servant and told him to go and look. There was perfect silence as we waited; we were thinking of the snow that covered all the earth. When the man returned, he declared that he had seen nothing. The dog was still howling incessantly, and the sound came from exactly the same place.

"We sat down to table, but we were still a little upset, especially we young people. All went nicely until the joint, when, hark, the bell began ringing again, three times in succession, three great, long peals, which thrilled us to our finger-tips and made us catch our breath. We sat looking at each other, our forks in the air, still listening, seized with a sort of supernatural fear.

"At last my mother spoke. 'It is extraordinary that they should have waited so long before coming back. Do not go alone, Baptiste; one of these gentlemen will go with you.'

"My uncle François rose. He was a Hercules, very proud of his strength, and afraid of nothing on earth. My father said to him, 'Take a gun. You never know what it may be.'

"But my uncle only took a stick, and went out at once with the servant.

"We others remained behind, trembling with terror and anxiety, without eating, without speaking. My father tried to reassure us. 'You will see,' he said, 'that it will be some beggar or some traveller lost in the snow. After he rang the first time, seeing that the door was not opened at once, he has tried to find his way, then, failing to do so, he has come back to our door.'

"We felt as if our uncle's absence lasted an hour. Then he returned furious and swearing. 'There's nothing, as I'm alive! Some one's playing a trick! There's nothing but that confounded dog howling a hundred yards away from the walls. If I had had my gun, I'd have shot him to make him quiet!'

"We sat down again, but we all continued anxious. We felt that this was not the end of it, that something was going to happen, and that presently the bell would ring again.

"And it did sound, at the very moment when we were cutting the Twelfth-cake. All the men got up together. My uncle François, who had drunk some champagne, declared that he was going to massacre IT, so furiously that my mother and my aunt caught hold of him to stop him. My father, in spite of being quite calm and not very fit (he dragged one leg ever after it had been broken by a fall from a horse), declared in his turn that he wanted to know what it was, and that he was going. My brothers, aged nineteen and twenty, ran to get their guns; and, as no one paid much attention to me, I possessed myself of a rook-rifle and so prepared to accompany the expedition.

"It set out at once. My father and my uncle led, with Baptiste carrying a lantern. My brothers Jacques and Paul followed, and I brought up the rear in spite of my mother's entreaties, who remained with her sister and my cousins on the door-step.

"The snow had begun again the last hour, and the trees were laden. The pines were bending under the heavy dusky mantle, like white pyramids, or enormous sugar loaves; and through the grey curtain of fine hurrying flakes it was almost impossible to make out the smaller shrubs, all pale in the gloom. The snow was falling so quickly that nothing else could be seen ten paces off. But the lantern threw a great light before us. When we began to descend the corkscrew staircase hollowed in the thickness of the wall, I was afraid in good earnest. I felt as if some one was walking behind me; as if some one was about to catch me by the shoulders and carry me off; and I wanted to go home. But, as I should have had to go all the way back through the garden, I did not dare.

"I heard the door to the plain being opened; then my uncle began to swear afresh. 'Hang it! he's off again. If I could see his shadow, I'd not miss him, the —.'

"It was eerie to see the plain, or rather to feel it was there before one; for it could not be seen, all that was visible was an endless veil of snow, above, below, in front, to right, to left, everywhere.

"My uncle spoke again, 'Wait, there is the dog howling. I'll go and show it how I can shoot. That will always be something.'

"But my father, who was a kindly man, replied, 'Better go and look for the poor animal that's crying with hunger. It's barking for help, poor wretch. It's calling like a human being in distress. Let's go to it.'

"And we set out through that curtain, through that dense unceasing fall, through that powder that filled the night and the air, that moved, floated, fell, and froze the flesh as it melted, froze as if it would burn, with a short sharp sting on the skin at each touch of the tiny white flakes.

"We sank to the knees in the soft chill dust, and had to step very high to walk at all. As we advanced the dog's bark became clearer and louder. My uncle cried, 'There it is!' We halted to observe it, as one ought to do on encountering an unknown enemy in the dark.

"For my part I could see nothing; then I made up with the others, and I made it out. The dog was a fearful and fantastic sight; a great black dog, a sheep-dog, with shaggy hair and a head like a wolf, standing on all fours at the very end of the long beam of light cast by the lantern on the snow. He did not move; he was quiet now, and was looking at us.

"My uncle said, 'It is strange, he does not come at us, and he does not run away. I have a good mind to take a shot at him.'

"But my father said decidedly, 'No, we must catch him.'

"Thereupon my brother Jacques said, 'But he is not alone. There's something beside him.'

"And there was something beside him, something grey, indistinct. We began to advance again carefully.

"When the dog saw us approaching, he squatted down on his hindquarters. He did not look savage, rather he seemed pleased that he had succeeded in attracting somebody.

"My father went straight up to him and caressed him. The dog licked his hands, and we saw that he was tied to the wheel of a little carriage, a sort of toy carriage completely enveloped in three or four woollen wraps. We took these cloths off carefully, and when Baptiste held his lantern to the door of the go-cart, which was like a kennel on wheels, we saw a little baby inside asleep.

"We were so dumbfounded that we could not utter a word. My father was the first to recover himself, and, as he was a large-hearted man, and somewhat of a visionary, he laid his hand on the top of the carriage and said, 'Poor forsaken child, you shall be one of us!' And he ordered my brother Jacques to wheel our find in front of us.

"And my father continued, thinking aloud:

"'Some love-child whose poor mother has come and rung at my door this Epiphany night, thinking of the Christ-child.'

"He stopped again, and four times shouted through the night at the pitch of his voice to the four corners of the heavens, 'We have taken it up!' Then, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder, he murmured, 'If you had shot at the dog, François?...'

"My uncle gave no answer, but he made a great sign of the cross in the darkness, for he was very devout, in spite of his swaggering airs.

"The dog had been untied, and followed us.

"I can assure you our return to the house was a

pretty sight indeed. First we had a lot of trouble to get the carriage up the rampart stair: but we managed at last, and wheeled it into the hall.

"How amused, and pleased, and frightened mamma was! As for my four little cousins (the youngest was six), they were like four hens around a nest. At last the baby, which was still sleeping, was taken out of its carriage. It was a girl, about six weeks old. And in its clothes we found ten thousand francs in gold, yes, ten thousand francs, which papa invested for her dowry. So she was not the child of poor parents . . . but perhaps the child of a nobleman and some small citizen's daughter . . . or else . . . we formed a thousand conjectures but we never learned anything . . . no, not a thing . . . not a thing. . . . Even the dog was not recognized by any one. He was strange to these parts. In any case, he or she who came three times and rang at our door must have known my parents well, to have chosen them in this way.

"So that is how Mademoiselle Perle made her entrance at six weeks' age to the Chantal family.

"We did not call her Mademoiselle Perle until later, however. She was baptized Marie Simonne Claire; Claire was to serve as her surname.

"I can tell you it was a funny return to the dining-room with the small mite, now awake, who gazed about her at the people and the lights with her big wondering blue eyes.

"We sat down once more and the cake was cut up. I was king, and I chose Mademoiselle Perle as my queen, just as you did a little ago. She was all unconscious then of the honour that was done her.

"Well, the child was adopted and brought up as one of the family. She grew up, years passed on. She was a nice, gentle, obedient child. Every one loved her, and she would have been dreadfully spoiled, if my mother had not prevented that.

"My mother was a woman of order and hierarchy. She consented to treat little Claire as she did her own sons, but at the same time she took care that the distance between us was clearly marked, and the situation distinctly laid down.

"Therefore, as soon as the child was old enough to understand, she explained her story to her, and gently, indeed tenderly, impressed upon the little one's mind that her relation to the Chantals was that of an adopted daughter, welcome, no doubt, but still a stranger.

"Claire grasped the situation with singular intelligence, and with surprising intuition. She learned to accept and keep the place assigned to her with such tact, grace, and delicacy that it moved my father to tears.

"My mother, too, was so touched by the passionate gratitude and the somewhat timid devotion of the darling, tender creature that she took to calling her 'my daughter.' Sometimes, when the little one had done something good or delicate, my mother would push her spectacles up on her brow, always a sign of emotion with her, and repeat, 'Why, she's a pearl, a regular pearl, the child!' The name stuck to little Claire, who became and remained for us Mademoiselle Perle."

IV

M. Chantal ceased speaking. He was seated on the billiard-table, dangling his feet, his left hand playing with a ball, while his right fiddled with a cloth which was used for wiping the chalk-marks off the scoring-slate, and which from its use we called the chalk-cloth. Rather red, his voice indistinct, he was speaking to himself now, lost in his recollections, going gently through the bygone things and the old events that were waking in his mind, as one strolls through the old gardens of the home where one was brought up, and where each tree, each path, each plant, the prickly hollies, the sweet-

smelling laurels, the yews, whose fat red berries crush between one's fingers, evoke at every step some little fact of our past life, one of those insignificant and delicious facts that make up the very foundation, the very warp of existence.

As for me, I stood there facing him, my back leaning against the wall, and my hands supported on my unused billiard-cue.

After a minute he resumed.

"Ah, me! How pretty she was at eighteen . . . and gracious . . . and perfect. . . . Ah! what a pretty . . . pretty . . . pretty and kind . . . and good . . . and charming girl! . . . She had eyes . . . blue eyes . . . transparent . . . clear . . . the like of which I have never seen . . . never!"

He lapsed into silence again. I asked, "Why has she never married?"

He replied, not to me, but to the word "married" that had been let fall:

"Why? Why? She never wished to . . . never wished. Though she had thirty thousand francs dowry, and was asked several times . . . she never wished to! She seemed sad in those days. That was when I married my cousin, little Charlotte, my wife, to whom I had been engaged for six years."

I looked at M. Chantal, and it seemed to me that I saw into his soul, that I suddenly saw into one of those humble and cruel dramas of honourable hearts, upright hearts, of hearts without reproach, into one of those mute, unexplored hearts, which no one has understood, not even those who are their uncomplaining and resigned victims.

And, suddenly impelled by a daring curiosity, I blurted out:

"Should not you have married her, Monsieur Chantal?"

He trembled, looked at me, and said:

"I? Marry whom?"

"Mademoiselle Perle."

"Why so?"

"Because you loved her better than your cousin."

He looked at me with strange, round, startled eyes, then he stammered:

"I loved her . . . I? . . . how? Who told you that? . . ."

"Why, any one can see it . . . and that's why you were so long in marrying your cousin, who waited six years for you."

He dropped the ball that he was holding in his left hand, seized the chalk-cloth with both hands, and, hiding his face with it, began to sob into it. He wept in a distressing, ridiculous way, as a sponge weeps when it is squeezed, from his eyes and nose and mouth all at once. And he coughed and hawked, blew his nose into the chalk-cloth, wiped his eyes, sneezed, began running again from every aperture in his face, with a throaty noise that suggested gargling.

As for me, frightened and ashamed, I wanted to make my escape and was at my wits' end to know what to say, or to do, or try.

And suddenly Madame Chantal's voice sounded on the stairs, "Will you soon be done with your smoke?"

I opened the door and called, "Yes, Madame, we are coming down."

Then I rushed to her husband, and seizing him by the elbows said, "Monsieur Chantal, my good friend Chantal, listen; your wife is calling you; pull yourself together, pull yourself together at once; we must go downstairs; pull yourself together."

He stammered, "Yes . . . yes . . . I'm coming . . . poor girl . . . I'm coming . . . tell her I'll be in a moment."

And he began conscientiously to wipe his face with the cloth that had been wiping all the marks off the slate for two or three years. When he finished, he showed half white, half red, his brow, his nose, his cheeks, his chin all smeared with chalk, and his eyes swollen and still full of tears.

I took him by the hands and dragged him into his room, murmuring, "I beg your pardon, I do indeed, Monsieur Chantal, for having given you pain, . . . but . . . I did not know . . . you . . . you understand."

He pressed my hand, "Yes . . . yes . . . there are some awkward moments . . ."

Then he plunged his face into the basin. When he lifted his head he still did not look presentable, but I thought of a little ruse. As he looked rather uncomfortably at himself in the glass, I said to him, "It will do if you tell them that you have some dust in your eye, and you can let them see it watering as much as you like."

So he went downstairs rubbing his eyes with his handkerchief. They made a fuss about him; every one wanted to look for the speck of dust, which was not to be found, and they related similar cases in which the doctor had eventually to be called in.

As for me, I had rejoined Mademoiselle Perle, and I was watching her, tormented by a burning curiosity, a curiosity which was becoming torture. She must really have been very pretty once, with her gentle eyes, so large, so calm, so open that they looked as if she never closed them as other people do. Her dress was rather ridiculous, a regular old maid's toilet, and, without making her look a fright, did not set her off.

I seemed to see into her soul, as I had seen into M. Chantal's a little before, as if I surveyed from end to end her humble, simple, devoted life; but a necessity forced my lips, an imperious necessity of questioning her, of learning if she too had loved him; if she had suffered like him from that long-drawn sorrow, secret and acute, which none knows, none sees, none suspects, but which finds vent at night, in the solitude of the darkened room. I looked at her, I saw her heart beating under her muslin bodice, and I asked myself whether that sweet, frank face had groaned night by night in

the moist thickness of her pillow, and sobbed, her body racked by convulsions, in the fever of her burning bed.

And I said to her, cautiously, as children do when they break a trinket to see inside it, "If you had seen M. Chantal crying just now, you would have been sorry for him."

She trembled, "What? He was crying?"

"Yes, he was crying!"

"And why was he?"

She seemed very much perturbed. I replied:

"Because of you."

"Because of me?"

"Yes. He was telling me how much he used to love you, and what it cost him to marry his present wife instead of you. . . ."

Her pale face seemed to me to lengthen a little; her eyes, always open, her calm eyes closed suddenly, so quickly that they seemed to have closed for ever. She slipped from her chair to the floor, and collapsed there gently, gradually, as a fallen veil might have done.

I cried, "Help, help! Mademoiselle Perle is unwell."

Madame Chantal and her daughters rushed to her, and, as they went for water and a napkin and vinegar, I got my hat and escaped.

I hurried away, my heart torn, my mind full of remorse and regret. And yet now and again I was glad; I felt as if I had done something commendable and necessary.

I kept asking myself, "Was I wrong? Was I right?" They had that in their souls like a bullet in a healed-up wound. Will they not be happier now? It was too late to renew their torture, and not too late for them to remember with fondness.

And perhaps some evening next spring, moved by a moonbeam falling through the branches on the grass at their feet, they will take each other's hands and clasp them in memory of all that suppressed cruel suffering;

and perhaps, too, that brief clasp will send through their veins a little of that thrill which otherwise they would never have known, and will excite in those dead ones, resuscitated in an instant, the swift, divine sensation of that intoxication, that madness, which gives lovers more happiness in one thrill than other men can gather in a lifetime.

THE END.

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